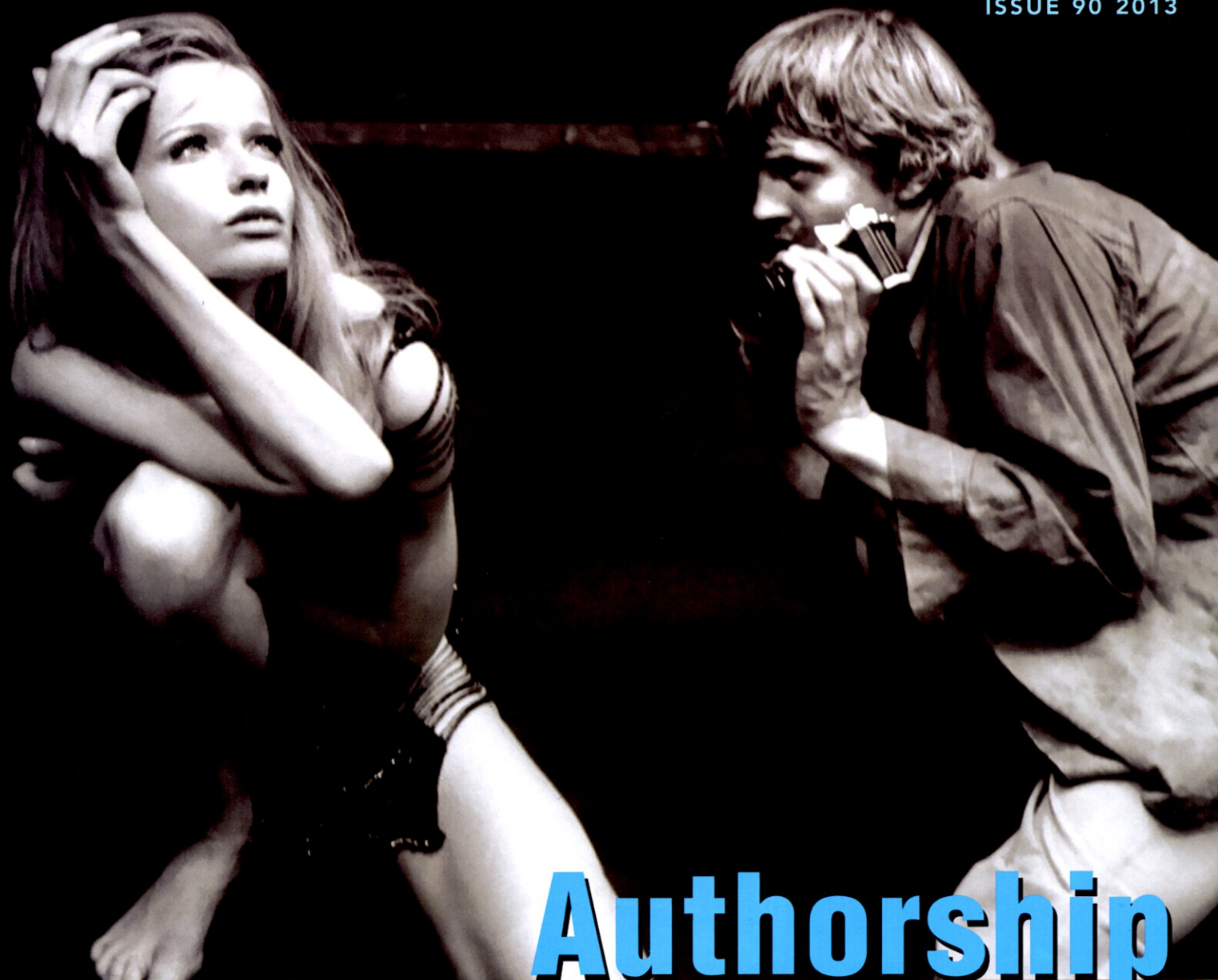


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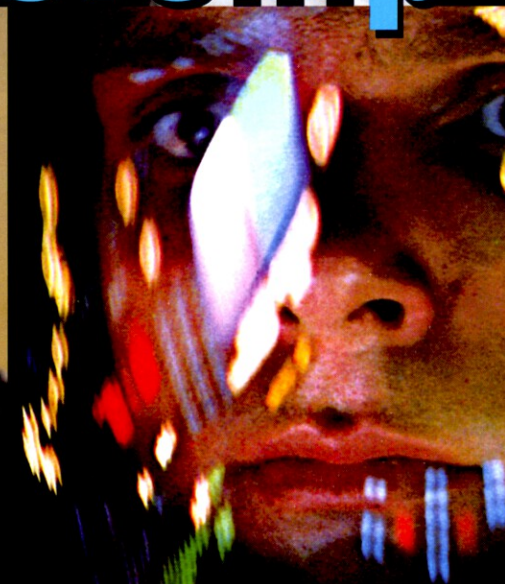
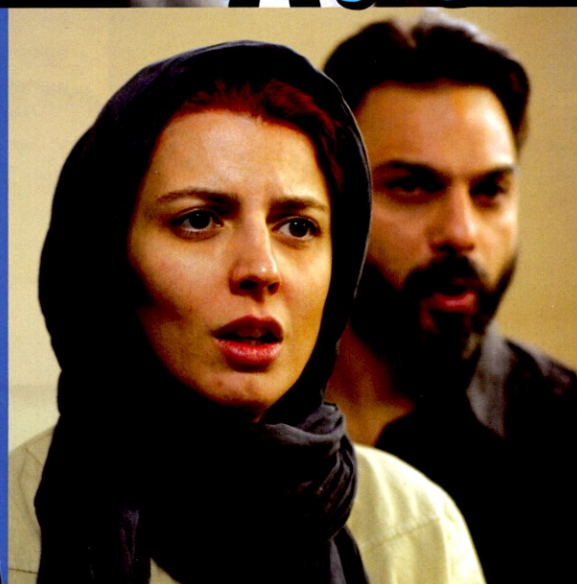
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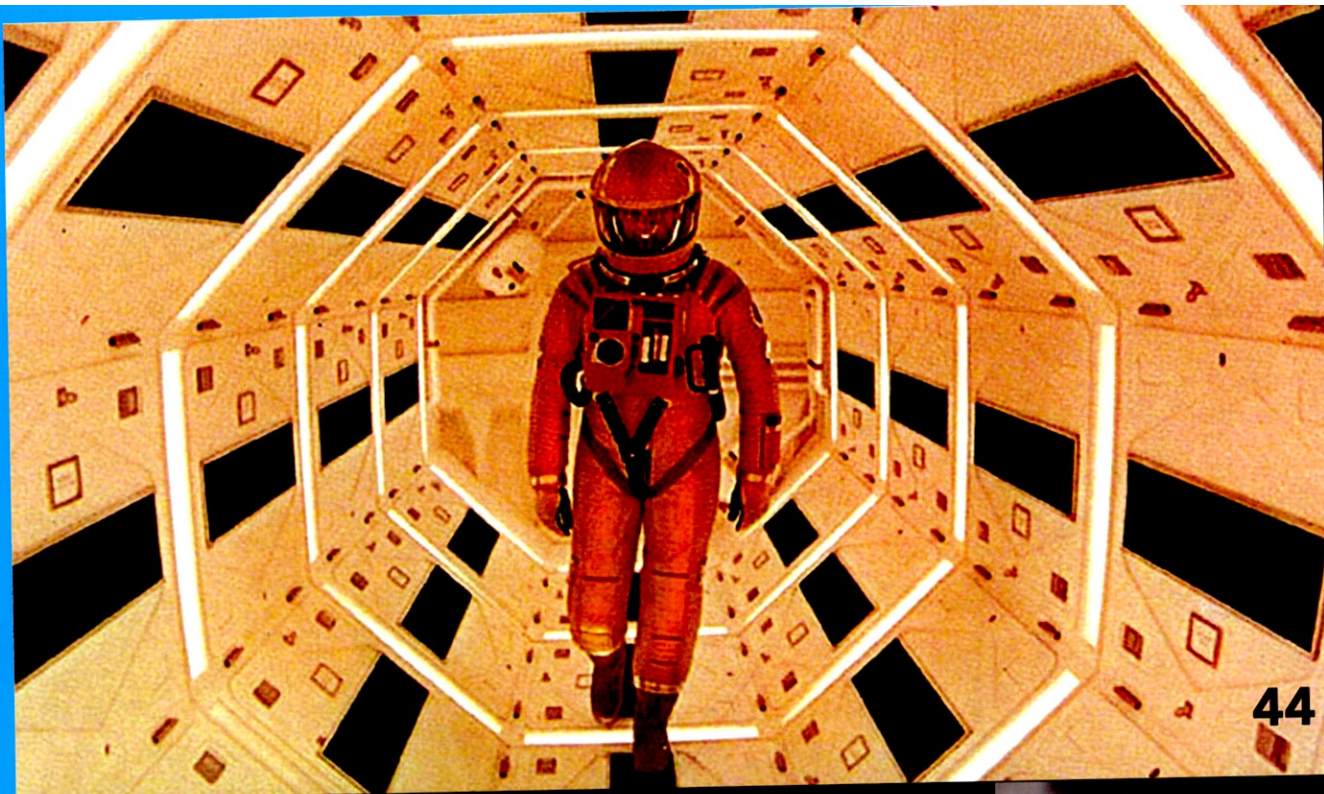


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EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Scott Forsyth, Florence Jacobowitz,
Richard Lippe, Susan Morrison
Design: Bob Wilcox Website: Mike Cartmell

MAILING ADDRESS

40 Alexander St., # 705, Toronto, ON., Canada, M4Y 1B5
Telephone 416-964-3534

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

CINEACTION ISSUE 91

FILM + ART

This issue seeks to investigate the many variations on the relationship between Art and Film inherent in the joining together of the two words, and welcomes all interests and approaches.

Some possible topics, such as 'Film as (an) Art (Form)' and 'the Art Film' have been much-discussed nodes of inquiry in film studies. Documentaries on Artists (*Painters Painting*, *Never Sorry: Ai Weiwei, Gerhard Richter Painting*) and Artist Biopics, old (*Lust for Life*, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*) and more recent (*Basquiat*, *Pollock*, *Frida*), have proved popular over the years in their attempts to find narrative drama in an artist's life/technique/ approach to art, or to merely find a way of presenting potentially difficult art to the general public. There are artist-made films, both experimental (Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, Andy Warhol), and those intended for commercial distribution (Robert Longo, David Salle, Julian Schnabel); and films like Banksy's *Exit through the Gift Shop* which blur the boundaries. In addition, there are artists (Christian Marclay, Omer Fast, Pipilotti Rist, Shirin Neshat) who use the medium of film/video for gallery-installed artwork.

Papers should be submitted in hard copy, mailed directly to Susan Morrison, the editor of this issue. Once accepted for publication, the paper will then be emailed as a file attachment. It would be appreciated if a brief proposal be submitted as early as possible as an indication of intention to submit.

A style guide is available on our website www.cineaction.ca

Please address all queries and submissions to the issue's editor: Susan Morrison, 314 Spadina Road Toronto ON, Canada M5R 2V6 smorr@cineaction.ca

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: MAY 31, 2013.

CINEACTION ISSUE 92

POLITICS AND CINEMA

This issue welcomes submissions on the relationship between politics and cinema, featuring discussions of particular films, filmmakers, genres, different national cinemas and different historical periods. Politics and cinema was a foundational focus for film studies, from the theoretical/political manifesto of "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" by *Cahiers du Cinema*, almost 50 years ago. All films are political, we learned. That focus has shifted and diversified through many permutations and trends over the intervening decades but still can illuminate both politics and cinema. Political and ideological critique of Hollywood remains important: as we watch the remake of *Red Dawn* or another *Die Hard*, is Reaganite cinema, so memorably dissected by Andrew Britton, returning? Did it ever go away? Or consider the 'Washington' films, *Argo*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Lincoln* with their intimate connections to the American state and party politics. Obamite cinema? Robin Wood sharply categorized Hollywood's Dominant Tendencies in the first issue of *CineAction*—what are the dominant tendencies of contemporary Global Hollywood? And what of the representational politics of gender, race and—the usually neglected—class? What is the state of politically motivated, militant cinema now? Discussions beyond Hollywood to international cinema, to documentary, to experimental cinema and beyond cinema to games, the internet and transmedia are particularly welcome. Book reviews too.

CANADIAN FILMS AND TELEVISION

Part of the issue will be devoted to Canadian film and television: historical and critical analysis, reviews of recent films, book reviews.

Papers submitted in hard copy to Scott Forsyth, Department of Film, Centre for Film and Theatre, York University, 4700 Keele St. Toronto ON, Canada M3J 1P3. If accepted, a file will be requested. Queries to sforsyth@yorku.ca. Guidelines for contributors are available at www.cineaction.ca.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE SEPT. 30, 2013

FRONT COVER IMAGE: *Blow Up*, Jacques Tati, *The Separation*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*

BACK COVER IMAGE: *Sans soleil*

IMAGES PROVIDED BY: TIFF Film Library, Richard Lippe

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CONTRIBUTORS

David Church is a Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University, and the editor of *Playing with Memories: Essays on Guy Maddin* (University of Manitoba Press, 2009).

David Greven is Associate Professor of English at the University of South Carolina. His most recent book is *Psycho-Sexual: Male Desire in Hitchcock*, De Palma, Scorsese, and Friedkin.

Brian Gibson is a professor of English Literature and Film at Université Sainte-Anne in Nova Scotia. He has been a film critic for *Vue Weekly* since 2002. Two of his essays—on the Dardennes' and Haneke's implication of the viewer and on the Abu Ghraib documentary *The Prisoner, Or: How I Planned To Kill Tony Blair*—have previously appeared in *CineAction*.

Peter Jameson is a PhD candidate at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, researching the theatrical origins of Joseph Losey's film style.

Richard Lippe teaches film study at York University, Toronto. He is currently putting together a book of Robin Wood's writings.

Arthur Nolletti, Jr. is Professor Emeritus of Film Studies and English at Framingham State University (Massachusetts) where he initiated the concentration in film studies. The author of *The Cinema of Goshō Heinosuke: Laughter Through Tears*, the editor of *The Films of Fred Zinnerman*, and co-editor of *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, Nolletti has published and lectured widely. He recently edited the special double issue of *Film Criticism* on Japanese director Kore-eda Hirokazu.

Dr. Anton Oleinik is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland and a Leading Research Fellow at the Central Economics and Mathematics Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences. He has authored three monographs, *Organized Crime, Prison and Post-Soviet Societies* (Ashgate, 2003; also published in French and in Russian), *Market as a Weapon: The socio-economic machinery of dominance in Russia* (Transaction, 2010; also published in Russian) and *Small worlds of social science: a transaction approach toward communication in networks and beyond* (Transaction, in press) and has edited two others (published by Ashgate in 2005 and Routledge in 2009).

George Porcari has lived in Lima, Peru and New York. He has taught film history at the Art Center College in California for ten years. He currently works as a librarian, a photographer and a filmmaker in Los Angeles. He is currently completing a book on the films of Antonioni and some of his work can be seen in the website lightmonkey.net

Jerry White is Canada Research Chair in European Studies at Dalhousie University.

Authorship

Despite the various attempts to discredit authorship, it remains a useful and valid approach to film study and criticism. The Museum of Modern Art is currently running a series entitled “An Auteurist History of Film” and locally, TIFF continues to program retrospectives devoted to various auteur directors, ranging from Bresson to Burton. Attributing a film to its director acknowledges a personal vision but still recognizes the collaborative aspect of the medium and its position within the politics of a culture. Historically speaking, authorship owes its initiation to the post-war period with Bazin and the New Wave critic/directors and their commitment to the notion of the personal voice and creative expression and Astruc’s idea of the camera ‘stylo’. Although the Hollywood cinema is largely defined as a product of corporate culture, which today replaces the studio system as mass-producing entertainment, it is not, nor has it ever been, monolithic and individuals like Martin Scorsese and Clint Eastwood, still manage to create valuable bodies of work. Internationally, directors like Michael Haneke, Abbas Kiarostami, Manoel Oliveira, the Dardennes brothers, Jean-Luc Godard are all examples of artists whose films invite an auteurist approach.

We dedicate this issue to the memory of Chris Marker and Andrew Sarris, a filmmaker and critic respectively who both died within the last year and exemplify the significance of authorship. Sarris’ book, *The American Cinema*, was a groundbreaking study which established authorship as a credible and valid framework for the evaluation of films and remains an important introduction to film studies. Sarris’ career in America is paralleled in England with the creation of *Movie* magazine, given prominence through the writings of critics like Robin Wood, Victor Perkins and later, Andrew Britton, amongst others. Wood’s auteur based studies like those on Hitchcock and Hawks and more recently, the monographs on Bergman and Penn have been reissued in new editions. We are reprinting Wood’s article on *Man of the West*, which appeared in issue 46 of *Cineaction*.

We are pleased to celebrate the career of Chris Marker in this issue. As an auteur, Marker insisted his intensely personal work be identified by his pseudonym derived from a different ‘stylo’, a magic marker; otherwise he was never photographed, didn’t give interviews and made no public appearances to promote his work. For instance in *Sans Soleil*, the letters of the cameraman Sandor Krasna are read by a woman, distancing the viewer from Marker while retaining his personal imprint. Marker remains one of the most distinctive and original filmmakers of the 20th century, along with others like Dziga Vertov or Roberto Rossellini. Marker’s legacy is, in part, attributable to his identity as a cosmopolitan artist who saw himself as a citizen of the world. This includes his commitment to the cinema, a medium which is intrinsically humanist at base.

—Florence Jacobowitz

—Richard Lippe

La Jetée

Chris Marker

1921–2012



Sans soleil



Andrew Sarris

1928–2012



Nagisa Oshima 1932–2013



Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence

Roger Ebert 1942–2013



Citizen Kane

Man(n) of the West(ern)



Man of the West

By ROBIN WOOD

The critic...is indeed concerned with evaluation, but to figure him as measuring with a norm which he brings up to the object and applies from the outside is to misrepresent the process. The Critic's aim is, first, to realize as sensitively and completely as possible this or that which claims his attention; and a certain valuing is implicit in the realizing. As he matures in experience of the new thing he asks, explicitly and implicitly: "Where does this come? How does it stand in relation to...? How relatively important does it seem?" —F.R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*

Preliminary

Man of the West is among the greatest Cinemascope movies of the 50s; others would include *Bonjour Tristesse*, *The Tarnished Angels*, *Bigger Than Life* and *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!* None of these is currently available on video, laserdisc or DVD in its correct format; the last two are not available at all. The copy from which I worked for this article is therefore missing approximately one third of Anthony Mann's magnificent film. I suppose I should be thankful that it appears to be an older video, made at the time when the video companies' solution to the problems of wide screen films was simply to lop off the sides: at least I can feel that I am seeing the middle two-thirds of the images Mann so meticulously and eloquently constructed, without the dubious benefits

of 'pan & scan', the more technologically 'advanced' solution that substituted a worse barbarity for the earlier one, forcing the interested viewer to try to distinguish between the director's own camera movements and edits and those so thoughtfully added by generally insensitive video technicians. However, many complex shots in which different actions are taking place in different areas of the screen are ruined by this (the climactic showdown in *Lassoo* suffers especially), and many of the simpler shots are now misframed so that we see only half of characters' heads or bodies, depriving the film of the poised elegance that partly offsets or 'places' the multiple brutalities of the narrative. It is my opinion that such barbaric practices should be forbidden by law: consider the outcry there would be if the equivalent were perpetrated on a Rembrandt portrait or the score of a Beethoven symphony. It is a problem to which such committed and enlightened film restorers as Scorsese and Coppola might well devote their attention.

Man of the West and Genre

Around the cusp of the decade there appeared three films that must surely be included in any responsible list of the 'ten greatest' westerns: *Man of the West* (1958), *Rio Bravo* (1959) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). Hawks's film can (in this context) be left to one side: it has all the trappings of a western but none of its essentials, as becomes clear if one juxtaposes it with its author's earlier *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not*, either of which would be mistaken for a western but both of which share in detail *Rio Bravo*'s thematic and narrative nucleus. Effectively, the other two, though sometimes categorized as 'revisionist', mark the end of the classical western, summing up and laying to rest its central concern with the taming of the wilderness in the interests of the growth of civilization. After *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, American civilization could no longer be celebrated or even, as in Ford's film, ambivalently and bleakly affirmed. The truly revisionist westerns are *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* and *Heaven's Gate*, both of which, in their very different ways, represent unambiguous denunciations of the 'progress' of American capitalism, refusing by reversing the terms of the classical western—a development already anticipated (though necessarily, for McCarey, in comic mode) in the wish-fulfillment fantasy of America's un-founding at the climax of *Rally 'Round the Flag Boys!*

L'Auteur est Mort—Vive l'Auteur!

It was, I believe, Roland Barthes who, long ago (as it now feels), first proclaimed the 'Death of the Author'. The author did not write, s/he was written—by ideology, primarily, but also by all the conventions, narrative patterns, generic formulae which support it and are, in their turn, at root ideological. The proclamation, and all the intensive but perverse and ultimately sterile ratiocination it made possible, proved indispensable to a few decades of relentless academic theorizing, 'learned papers' delivered at conferences, hence entries on resumes. Many a misguided career, and enormous quantities of obfuscatory and mystificatory verbiage, grew out of it, proliferating into a protective forest of impenetrable branches, brushwood and foliage like that surrounding the Sleeping Beauty's palace, in the midst of which the initiated elite could bathe in the bleak cold sunlight of mutual admiration and emulation. It proved indispensable also as the basis of postmodernism, with its rejection (in its most extreme forms) of the old-fashioned notion that some texts are more valuable than others. Its credo reminds me of the

Caucus Race in *Alice in Wonderland*: 'Why, everyone has won, and all must have prizes'—whether they are Mozart or Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, Tolstoy or Harold Robbins. (Barthes, whose major work of textual analysis was on Balzac, and who agreed to play a celebrated Victorian literary author in a film by a leading French *autuer*, would, one assumes, have been horrified).

One hears very little, today, of the Author's demise; s/he has gradually and unobtrusively slipped back, in a variety of careful but flimsy disguises, into the general critical/theoretical discourse, though usually without acknowledgement or explicit recognition and definitely without the decency of retraction. What can now be said of the contemporary critical situation?

Certainly, the Author, like the rest of us, is born into and develops within that protean monster the dominant ideology. Bad authors never move beyond that and their relation to it is simple (e.g. James Cameron); authors of distinction either consciously challenge it (Godard) or, through the peculiarities of their individual psychology, create disturbances within it (Hawks, Hitchcock), undermining it from the inside. No author works in a vacuum, creating works of pure genius out of some divine afflatus called 'inspiration'. Perhaps the theorists of the past few decades would like, at least, to claim responsibility for such radical insights. But I have news for them: similar assumptions have long been present (perhaps in less fully articulated formulations, because greater explicitness seemed unnecessary) in traditional aesthetics. The most conservative of traditional literary critics—and that profoundly radical one F.R. Leavis, who spelled it out—were not unaware that Shakespeare invented neither the iambic pentameter, nor blank verse, nor the rhymed couplet, nor the plots of his own plays, nor the genres and manifold formal conventions of the Elizabethan theatre. He simply *used* them far beyond the capabilities or ambitions of any of his contemporaries. Neither was he untouched by the ideological norms and assumptions of his age. That he transcended this complex of conditions, restrictions and influences was due to his immense fund of creativity, and can be explained in no other way. Without the artist there is no art. To deny the reality of human creativity—or to fail to honour it—is to refuse any value to human existence, art being only one of the forms (the most concrete, where its workings can be most readily perceived and appreciated) that creativity can take. Such a belief has never been more necessary than it is today, when creativity has been so stunted, frustrated and perverted within our culture by the 'advance' of capitalism ('corporate', 'monopoly', 'consumer', whatever). Only a revolutionary resurgence of the creative spirit (manifesting itself necessarily with a new, extreme, radical Left) can give us any hope for the future of our civilization, and indeed for that of life on this planet.

The reference to Leavis was not accidental or circumstantial. For all his limitations, blindnesses and obstinacies he remains one of the most *necessary* of all critics, and his work should still be a living force. His detractors have barely penetrated the surface of his significance: minnows nibbling impotently at a shark. For a more detailed, albeit tentative, account of how the essentials of Leavis's position could be incorporated with in a contemporary radicalism, see my article in *CineAction* 8, reprinted as part of the introduction to *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* and its sequel, 'Creativity and Evaluation', in *CineAction* 21/22.

Mann the Author

First, the 'author' I am concerned with here is that of the series of westerns beginning with *Winchester 73* and culminating in

Man of the West, all but the last starring James Stewart. There is also the author of the earlier (and very impressive) series of B-movie *noirs* and the author of the later (and also very impressive) epics, *El Cid* and *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. Certainly one can trace, through all of these, specifiable recurring characteristics of style and theme that would point to an overall author called Anthony Mann. Yet when an artist shifts into a new genre he becomes, inevitably, a somewhat different author, the characteristics inflected, modified, extended by the generic particularities: the Shakespeare of the romantic comedies is not quite the same Shakespeare as that of the tragedies, though no one will fail to see close resemblances. Which is to say that one cannot isolate 'authorship' from the conventions, narrative patterns, audience expectations, through which it is expressed.

Second, there is the question of collaborators: most importantly here, stars and screenwriters. As for the latter, it seems to me clear on internal evidence (I can produce no documentation) that Mann exercised a considerable degree of control over his scripts—that his authorship is not only a matter of stylistics. The most fully developed of the Stewart westerns *Bend of the River* was scripted by Borden Chase, *Man of the West* by Reginald Rose, yet the two have so much in common (and so much also with the other Stewart films by other writers) that it is impossible not to perceive a common presence. Was it Rose who made *Man of the West* the most schematic, the most consciously allegorical of these films, or was it Mann, by this time fully aware of the essential meaning of these works and wishing to construct a definitive statement? As for stars, *Man of the West* would clearly have been a somewhat different film if Stewart (with whom Mann's professional relationship had ended with some acrimony) had played the Gary Cooper role: different but not better. The hysteria at the character's core (and at the core of all Mann's characteristic protagonists) would have been far more overt and 'acted out' whereas with Cooper it is perhaps the more powerful and frightening because rigorously repressed, behind a stony face and clenched teeth.

The clearest way to define the Mann of the westerns is by an elementary comparison/contrast with the westerns of John Ford, so central to the wilderness/civilization opposition hence a touchstone for the difference of all other westerns, both in degree and in kind. I shall explore the differences under a series of headings.

Civilization, Domesticity, Community

Belief in the value of white American civilization is at the core of Ford's westerns, and the poignance of his career—the trajectory from *Drums Along the Mohawk* to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*—arises from its gradual erosion (though the disillusionment was already implicit in *Stagecoach*). That the belief necessitated the acceptance (seeming casual and unreflecting, taken-for-granted) of genocide is of course for the modern viewer the great and in many cases insuperable block to the acceptance of his work, and Ford's late attempt at an apology, *Cheyenne Autumn*, is thoroughly compromised, his 'savages' suddenly noble ones, the presentation (for all the apparent effort) essentially condescending and sentimental. The belief, however, gave us Ford's most touching (and often highly complex) sequences, notably in the recurrent motif of the community dance of which the most celebrated is in *My Darling Clementine* but the finest in *Drums Along the Mohawk*. In Mann, civilization, although a touchstone for the characters' actions, remains little more than a conventional 'given',

his work offering nothing comparable in its detailed and loving realization to those two dances. This is perhaps why his work often looks somewhat thin beside that of Ford, but it has important corollaries: the native Americans play no more than a marginal role (if even that) in most of his westerns, with the crucial exception of the first, *Devil's Doorway*, the most outspoken and rigorous of the 50s pro-Indian westerns and the earliest, preceding the far more celebrated *Broken Arrow* a few months; the cavalry (necessarily ennobled in Ford, crucial to his work as the defenders of white civilization) almost no role at all, appearing only briefly in *Winchester 73* and *The Naked Spur*. The problems for us today, maximized in Ford, are minimized in Mann, whose westerns are far more readily accessible to the contemporary viewer, far more 'modern' in their concerns and attitudes (it is no great step from *Man of the West* to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, other than in terms of quality and intelligence).

As for domesticity, the necessary point is similar and follows on logically. Marriage and family are central to Ford's work, relatively marginal in Mann's. The domesticated woman (wife, mother) is at the heart of Ford's view of civilization—almost, one might say, the pretext for the extermination of the Native Americans. The family as a concept is crucial to Ford, the films ranging through celebrations of its construction (*Drums Along the Mohawk*) or reconstruction (*Rio Grande*) to laments for its dissolution under the pressure of external forces (*The Grapes of Wrath*, *How Green Was My Valley*). If memory serves, *Man of the West* is the only Mann western in which the hero has a wife and children, and we never see them; they are the pretext, not for the annihilation of a race, but for the civilizing of the protagonist. The other westerns all move toward the conventional 'construction of the heterosexual couple', but the effect is the same: the women (while vivid and lively enough to be interesting) are there essentially to give substance to the hero's motivation for overcoming his criminal past or continuing proneness to violence and be able to 'settle down'.

Landscape

Simply to mention the word in relation to Ford is to evoke mental images of Monument Valley, through which we shall picture either a stagecoach or a group of cavalymen passing, at once dwarfed and ennobled by its grandeur, the images accompanied by stirring music (either martial or exuberant). The corollary of Monument Valley in Ford's work is the green and fertile corn and pasture land of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, or the riverscape of the first Ann Rutledge sequence of *Young Mr. Lincoln*, both made in 1939. The human-friendly landscapes of *Drums* are never recapitulated in a subsequent Ford western, though there is an equivalent in *The Quiet Man*, an overtly nostalgic film about a past its extreme stylization suggests is more mythic than actual. There is an obvious, prosaic reason for this: *Drums*, while generically a western, is set in the East. Nevertheless, its landscapes are poetically appropriate to the film that is Ford's only unambiguous celebration of a possible American future, a future that could be convincingly envisaged only by a return to the remote 'American' past, the War of Independence. Landscape in Ford, it must be stressed, whether the Monument Valley desert or the fertile meadowland, is never merely decorative or picturesque. I find it difficult to recall shots in his films of unpeopled landscapes. The derivation of his images seems rather to be from the figures-in-a-landscape paintings of nineteenth century Romanticism, more specifically in their gentler



manifestations, more Constable than Turner, ennobling even when awe-inspiring.

Where Ford has mesas, Mann has mountains: not quite perhaps Hopkins' '...cliffs of fall/ Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed' as they are real as well as metaphorical, yet one might certainly say of them 'Hold them cheap/May who ne'er hung there'. No one would attempt to climb a Monument Valley mesa, and they are perfectly easy to go around; when a mountain appears in a Mann movie you are pretty certain that it will be climbed, and with extreme difficulty. If Ford's 'mountains' are always more than picturesque, Mann's are not picturesque at all. As for the fertile landscapes, they are also present but invite the same kind of comparison as the treatment of community and domesticity: their presentation is altogether more perfunctory than it is in the Fordian equivalent. What seem the most fully characteristic, most fully realized, of Mann's westerns—*Winchester 73*, *Bend of the River*, *The Naked Spur*, *Man of the West*—are all archetypal 'journey' movies, and their trajectories are always similar: a progression from low to high, from the fertile valley to the highest (usually barren, often snow-covered) peaks, each stage of the journey marking a development in an increasingly intense conflict of which either the turning point (*Bend of the River*) or the climax and resolution will be reached at the summit.

Violence

Considering the amount of violence that necessarily occurs in Ford's westerns, he seems curiously reticent about its effects, seldom lingering on the pain inflicted; one might reasonably complain that people in his films die too easily, the 'bad' (especially if they are 'Indians') simply falling over, the 'good' preserv-

ing their courage and endurance to the end. (Interestingly, the nearest to an exception is *Drums Along the Mohawk*, as if the film were trying to insist on the immense cost demanded by its affirmation). Mann, while no better on the death of aborigines on the few occasions on which they appear, consistently emphasizes the effort and horror of killing, the pain of an inflicted wound, the agony of violent death. Where Ford keeps us at a distance, Mann forces us in close, sparing us as little as contemporary censorship would permit. The most extreme instance (though it has numerous rivals, especially in *Man of the West*) is perhaps the deliberate, point blank, shooting of James Stewart's gun hand in *The Man from Laramie*, our view transferred from the gun pressing into the forcibly extended hand to a closeup of Stewart's face as the bullet is fired. In the overall context of the films, this 'in your face' insistence is placed, balanced, but never cancelled out, by the equally characteristic use of long shot, crane shots, depth of field, and, in *Man of the West*, Mann's superb use of the width of the CinemaScope screen.

In Ford, violence is a necessary evil but not central to his pre-occupations. In Mann it is an essential aspect of his central theme, which one might here define as his sense of an inherent and ultimately inextinguishable criminal violence in male humanity: his heroes may struggle against it and even appear to succeed, but we are left with the sense that it has been suppressed rather than annihilated; his villains are those who don't struggle. The films permit one to see this as 'essentialist', but it might equally be enlisted as an exceptionally 'felt' and powerful precursor of the critique of 'masculinity' which has become a major concern since the re-emergence of feminism in the 60s. To draw these threads together: the harshness of Mann's view

of (at least) male humanity is mirrored in the harshness of his landscapes, and accounts for the general lack of confidence in the films' presentation of community and civilization.

I must leave the contrast with Ford to mention two other facets of Mann's preoccupations that have direct bearing on *Man of the West*. Readers will have noticed that, in my dating of the end of the 'classical' western, I ignored Andre Bazin, who placed its demise much earlier. But Bazin's definition of the 'classical' western was much too narrow: its development into the 'psychological western' of the 50s was more logical extension than departure, locating the civilization/wilderness dichotomy as internal as well as external conflict, the struggle now taking place within the protagonists' individual psyches. Mann's westerns offer the finest, most fully elaborated examples of this development.

Finally, it is worth citing Mann's unrealized project when he died: a western based on *King Lear*, the three daughters changed into sons, to be entitled *The King*. The project was not new—he had been haunted by *Lear* for many years—and one can trace figurations of it in at least two of the westerns. It is clearest, perhaps, in *The Man from Laramie*, where only one of the three 'sons' is related to the patriarch by blood, and in which the patriarch goes blind, thereby combining *Lear* and Gloucester in a single character. But if *The Man from Laramie* is nearest in narrative, *Man of the West* captures far

more of the *spirit* of *Lear*, the play's excesses, its horror and terror.

Man of the West

A basic Leavisian principle is that true criticism is a collaborative act between critic and reader, and imaginary dialogue: 'This is so, isn't it?'... 'Yes, but...' Obviously, this presupposes that the reader is already in possession of the object criticized. This is not situation one finds today too often in university teaching: I have had students whose essays consist largely of quotations from a wide range of critics, accepted without question because they are in print, on films that they (the students) have not seen. It is not really their fault: in many cases (I have found), it is what other professors have taught them is meant by the term 'research'. And in any case the unthinking acceptance of second-hand opinion is among the many diseases of our contemporary cultural situation in which 'education' professes to encourage freedom of thought but invariably places it within certain very narrow bounds. It should not (but may) be necessary, therefore, to say here that the following sketchy analysis is written for people who are already familiar with *Man of the West*. For anyone who is not, the film is readily available on video.

The Symbolic Drama: Names and starting-point

I spoke above of the film's tendency toward allegory, and cer-



tain of its elements (especially its place names) are clearly allegorical. But, overall 'allegory' is too clearcut; 'symbolic drama' suits it better.

First, then, the names, beginning with the two main characters. Link Jones/Gary Cooper, the reformed outlaw who has settled, is married with children, and is now a trusted member of his community, is clearly the 'link' between wilderness and civilization. Critics really have no excuse for misspelling *Dock* Tobin/Lee J. Cobb: he spells out his name for Billie/Julie London, and 'Doc' has no resonance. Two meanings of 'Dock' are resonant. First, as every gardener knows, the dock-plant is the hardest weed of all to destroy, its stem extremely tough, its roots driving deep into the soil. This seems to me the primary meaning of the name of the incorrigible, aged and long-surviving leader of the Tobin gang. Secondly, to 'dock' something is to cut it off. Dock rapes the woman who loves Link and whom Link desires but cannot allow himself to touch: he is an extreme case of the 'castrating father'.

As for the place names: At the film's opening, Link is traveling from the new settlement of *Good Hope* to the established town of *Fort Worth*, his mission being to hire a teacher for the school newly completed; he stops briefly at the small intermediate town of *Crosscut*, the dividing line not only for the two stages in the development of civilization but also (as we discover subsequently) for the separation of civilization from wilderness, the rattlesnake- and outlaw-infested terrain through which the train must pass to reach *Fort Worth*, terrain that becomes Link's testing-ground, jeopardizing the fulfillment of his mission. The stages of civilization are very clearly defined. Link arrives in *Crosscut* on horseback (the railway has not yet reached *Good Hope*); he has never seen a train before, is startled by its blast of steam across the platform, and, when on it, can't squeeze his long legs into the available space. But even in *Crosscut* a train is still a sufficient novelty for local children to run along the platform waving as it pulls out.

The Journey

The journey from *Crosscut* follows the archetypal Mann trajectory and can be divided into six stages, marked by pauses, and an epilogue: from *Crosscut* to refueling depot, the train passing through flat fertile land, trees bordering the tracks; from the depot to the farmhouse and barn of Link's distant past, the three stranded passengers (Link, Billie, Beasley/ Arthur O'Connell) on foot; from the farmhouse upwards to the mid-point (of the journey, of the

film) resting stop, site of the hand-to-hand fight between Link and Coaley /Jack Lord, a hilltop still green, with low bushy trees (death of Coaley); from there to the nocturnal stop among the mountains, a terrain of bare rock and snow, from which Link and Trout/Royal Dano will set out for *Lassoo*; *Lassoo*, the ghost town, once a thriving mining community, huddled amid barren peaks, site of the climactic showdown and the deaths of Trout, Ponch/Robert J. Wilke and Claude/John Dehner; Link's return to the previous stop, to find that Billie, in his absence, has been raped by Dock (death of Dock). The epilogue has Link and Billie riding away in Dock's wagon, through a cactus desert, presumably to *Fort Worth*.

Each of the pauses marks a progression upward into bleaker, harsher, more barren terrain; a progression in the external conflict between Link and the Tobin gang; and a progression in the internal conflict within Link, the resurgence of his own propensity to violence. This most fully conscious of westerns spells out its central quandary very explicitly in Link's speech to Billie between the arrival of Claude and the departure for *Lassoo* (which Dock believes is still a thriving mining community on a stagecoach line with a bank that will make the gang rich). Link and Billie walk away from the group toward a hill on which there is a single dead tree, prominent in the background of the image through most of the scene. He refers to his past (as Dock's adopted 'son'), and tells her that the people of *Good Hope* know of it and now accept and trust him; but now: 'I feel like killing—like a sickness coming back. I want to kill every last one of those Tobins. And that makes me just like they are.' By the end of the film (of the journey) he has fully satisfied that desire, and the journey's various stages continuously raise the question (never unambiguously answered) of whether Link kills 'every last one of those Tobins' because he has to or because he wants to.

Violence and Psychoanalysis.

The film's great centerpiece (which only Mann could have realized so fully and uncompromisingly) where this question is most disturbingly raised is the fight with Coaley that culminates in the latter's death (though not at the hands of Link—Coaley inadvertently shoots the gambler Beasley who steps in front of Link, and is then shot by Dock). The word 'realism' is always problematic, but here it seems inescapable, at least as a relative term: we have seen so many slogging matches in westerns where two men go at it without pause, taking and giving punches with seemingly inexhaustible stamina until one of them abruptly falls. The Link/Coaley fight (perhaps the most painful to watch in a Hollywood film prior to *Mandingo* and *Raging Bull*) is meticulously thought through and choreographed in its ebb and flow of energies, in Coaley's progressive humiliation and desperation and in the escalation of Link's vengeful determination to spare him nothing. The viewer might ask her/himself a question: at what point in the fight does our sense of excess, and of Coaley's humiliation, become so strong that our identification with Link (an identification on which the film clearly, up to a point, depends) is weakened?—at what point do we want to call out 'No-enough!?' At or before the point where defeating Coaley passes into the act of publicly stripping him, before his 'father', Dock and his 'brothers', the other gang members? And important aspect of Coaley's humiliation is sibling rivalry: from the moment of Link's return it is clear that Dock (even if he doesn't entirely trust him) privileges him, treating him as his favourite, the prodigal son.

Indeed, at the fight's outset, we may ask ourselves Why pre-



The Man from Laramie

cisely (but the answer will be anything but precise) does Link deliberately provoke Coaley, needling him into (re)action with his taunts? There is clear enough surface motivation: Coaley held a knife to Link's throat until the blood ran, as a means of forcing Billie to perform a public strip for the gang; one humiliation deserves another, and Link (who has felt compelled to describe Billie as 'his woman', as the only terminology Dock would understand) can also see his provocation of Coaley in terms of a civilized 'manly' response to the deliberate humiliation of a woman he has treated, in their intimate exchanges, with consistent respect. Yet the explanation fails to satisfy, within the context the film has set up ('I want to kill every last one...'): Link appears to derive a personal, sadistically erotic, satisfaction from it. Coaley, like Claude, is Link's cousin, and, as a member of the gang with whom Link used to ride, rob and kill, hence (again like Claude) a possible *alter ego*, the Link that might have been. During the enforced strip, he and Link are in close physical contact, Coaley behind the chair on which Link is seated, holding him with one arm while he holds the knife to his throat with the other; and he forces Link to watch Billie undress just as he, Coaley, watches. We are already aware that Link desires Billie, while forcing himself to repress the desire. We may see Link, then, when he follows through on Coaley's defeat by forcibly undressing him, at once as reenacting Billie's strip whilst stripping the man whose physical contact may also have aroused him. In both cases the fight is an act of repudiation: 'No, I don't want those things. I have a wife...'

From Lasso to Lear

Of the four violent deaths that occur in *Lasso*, only that of Ponch could be called 'conventional', the other three all being in different ways, shocking. We do not expect the plump, middle-aged Mexican woman, perceptibly trembling as she tries to steady the gun in both hands, to be abruptly shot dead: she is the kind of character who is usually exempt. She is terrified, and clutches the gun only in a desperate attempt to defend herself and what property remains within the abandoned bank; when Trout shoots her she is saying 'There is no bank here...I'm afraid...', and Link is replying 'Lady, we're not going to hurt you.' Trout's own death, shot by Link in self-defence, is the one time in the film he makes a sound: a series of terrible, high-pitched, agonized cries as he staggers down the ghost town's main street toward Dock's camp before falling in the dust. Mann's staging of Claude's death is the most resonant of all. When the gang first appeared in the film they hid in the shadows under the small bridge by the water-tower, the train (with Link on board) stopping on the tracks above them, a telling image of the 'civilized' conscious and the criminality and violence it represses, of Link's 'buried' past. The image is echoed at the *Lasso* climax. Claude, like Coaley, is Link's cousin and *alter ego*, the man he might have become. Link is on the porch of the bank, Claude (already severely injured) crawling underneath in the shadows to fire upwards through the boards. In order to kill him Link must descend to his level, distracting Claude by hurling one gun along the porch, then rolling down to the ground, parallel, to kill him with another.

Link returns to camp to tell Dock that he killed all three of his remaining 'sons', and finds that Dock has raped Billie—brutally and violently, as it clear that she has put up a struggle: Lear-as-rapist anticipates Lear-as-molester (of both his elder daughters) in the frustratingly disappointing feminist rethinking of the play, *A Thousand Arces*, closer in plot than *Man of the West* but

far further from it in spirit and intensity. He tells Dock that he is going to 'take him in', but we know that he knows that Dock is extremely unlikely to permit this, that Link will have to kill his 'father'. I have frequently found Lee J. Cobb's performances a liability, his desire to show the audience how much he is acting, what hard work he is doing, often going right 'over the top'. This is certainly true of *Man of the West*, but here it works, Mann using the persona brilliantly: not just Cobb, but *Dock*, is 'giving a performance' all the time, desperately trying to convince himself (as well as his ragtag gang) that he is not an anachronism, that he still 'has it in him'. Without the larger-than-lifeness the grandiosity of the climactic confrontation would scarcely work: Link, his back to us, in the foreground of the screen, Dock in distant long shot, striding along a plateau of sheer rock, silhouetted against the sky, then descending to fire his gun first over Link's head, then, wildly, in his general direction, then that extraordinary fall, rolling down past Link, arms outstretched, trying to steady himself even as he dies.

If one accept that the film is a sketch for Mann's projected *Lear*, one may ask, Who, then, is Cordelia? Link is, after all, from the viewpoint of 'civilization', the good son, Claude the bad. And Link is also Dock's favorite: he might say, as Lear said of Cordelia, 'I loved [him] most, and thought to set my rest/On [his] kind nursery.' But it is Claude who is passionately faithful to his father (as he tells Link on the journey, 'I watch out for that old man. I love him'): when Link kills him he clearly believes that he is already dying, and his motivation is continuing to attempt to kill Link is clearly to protect Dock. The film's disturbing power arises in part from its relation to the 'family melodrama': fidelity to family set in absolute opposition to fidelity to 'civilized' values rather than embodying them.

Journey's End (of the film, of the western?)

The final scene reinstates the *status quo*: Link and Billie are going (one assumes) to Fort Worth, their original destination, and to pursue their original goals (Link will find a school-teacher and return to Good Hope, Billie will get a job singing and being sexually harassed). But there is no return to the green and fertile pasture land on which civilization can be developed: Link is (ominously?) driving Dock's wagon, and they are passing through a rift between barren mountains, the only vegetation cactuses. What does this ending leave us with? The answer must be, I think, very little. Link's 'settled' life remains no more than a given, and we must take its alleged satisfactions on trust—if we choose to take them at all. The bleakness must be attributed to Anthony Mann's honesty: within the parameters of the classical western, and within those of American culture then or now, the wilderness/civilization opposition as a clear cut either/or choice is a choice not worth making. If we feel at the end that everything has been *emptied out*, we remain free to search (if we wish) for ways of transcending it. Mann's work defines this problem with great precision, great clarity, great force

Note

I am fully aware that this article owes a great debt to the writings on Mann by Jim Kitses (in his indispensable book *Horizons West*) and Douglas Pye (in *CineAction* 29, also available in *The Movie Book of Westerns*). I have admired both in the past but have deliberately refrained (as is my usual practice) from revisiting them for fear of feeling so intimidated as to be unable to write. I am not aware of any actual detailed 'borrowings', but if any are present here I hope they will find this acknowledgement sufficient.

A Catalan Gaze Upon Ireland

JOSÉ LUIS GUERIN'S *INNISFREE*

By JERRY WHITE

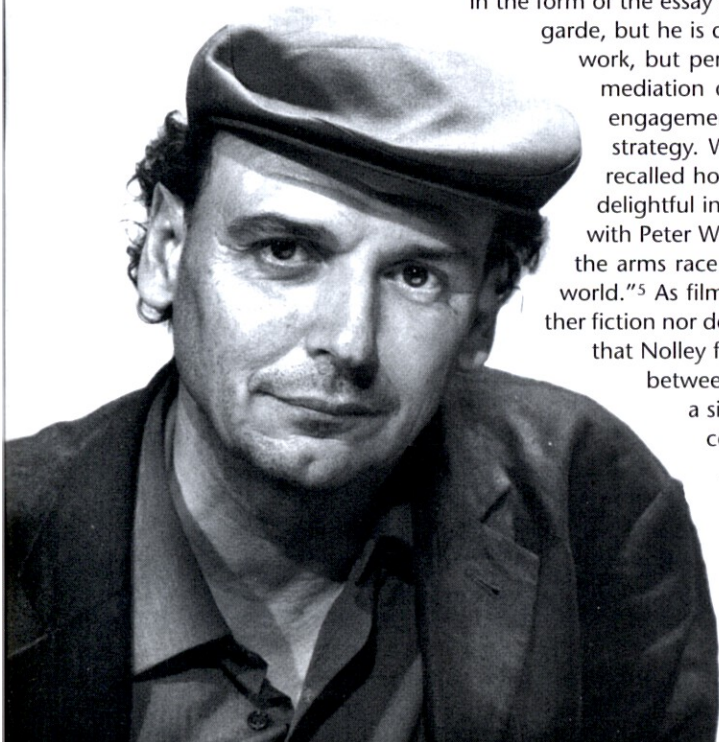
In the history of Irish cinema, John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1954) occupies a central although sometimes awkward place. In her 2004 book *Irish National Cinema* (whose cover is a full-colour photo of Maureen O'Hara from *The Quiet Man*), Ruth Barton summarises it this way: "Whether as a prototype or a point for departure for counter-representation, John Ford's best-known Irish film has come to dominate cinematic depictions of Ireland."¹ This sense of being a "prototype" was a crucial part of the neo-Hollywood Irish cinema of the 1990s, visible in films like 1990's *The Field* (directed by Jim Sheridan, who left Ireland for Hollywood in 2002), 1998's *This is My Father* (directed by the American filmmaker Paul Quinn) and 1998's *Waking Ned Divine* (directed by the English filmmaker Kirk Jones and shot on the Isle of Man). This urge for a series of "counter-representations," on the other hand, was the animating focus of the independent Irish cinema of the 1970s and 80s, such as Bob Quinn's Irish-language films *Poitín* (1977) and *Budawanny* (1986) or the films of his apprentice Joe Comerford such as *Down the Corner* (1977), *Traveller* (1981, written by Neil Jordan), or *Reefer and the Model* (1987).² Films by Quinn, Comerford and their contemporaries, films defined by a radical political critique of the economic underdevelopment of and romantic attitudes about Ireland's marginal areas (especially the west coast, but also North Dublin and Northern Ireland for Comerford), were often explicit responses to Ford. Quinn, for example, has written how he was drawn to adopt Fr. Pádraig Standún's 1983 novel *Súil le Breith* as the film *Budawanny* because "The wonder of it was his unpatronising treatment of real (as opposed to *The Quiet Man*) peasant/fisher life."³ Is there some way out this conundrum, a relationship to John Ford that sees him neither as Ireland's hero nor its *bête noir*?

I think there is, but it comes neither from Ireland nor Hollywood. It comes from Catalonia, in the form of the essay filmmaker José Luis Guerín. Guerín is, no doubt, a figure of the avant-garde, but he is defined by an intense cinephilia. This is visible throughout his body of work, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in his 1990 film *Innisfree*.⁴ This is a mediation on *The Quiet Man*, one that emanates in equal measure passionate engagement with the film and a desire to get beyond Ford's representational strategy. Writing in these very pages about twenty five years ago, Ken Nolley recalled how "I recently re-watched *The Quiet Man* and found it as amiable and delightful in many ways as it ever was for me, and I have just finished a weekend with Peter Watkins' monumental new film, *The Journey*, a 14½ hour exploration of the arms race from the perspective of people in 12 different countries around the world."⁵ As filmmakers, Guerín and Watkins share both a formal pattern that is neither fiction nor documentary as well as a strong political commitment. The connections that Nolley finds between *The Journey* and *The Quiet Man* are just as clearly visible between *Innisfree* and *The Quiet Man*, and these connections go well beyond a simple shared subject matter. Indeed, Nolley identifies the real point of connection between *Innisfree* and *The Quiet Man* when he writes of *The Journey* that "Watkins' film... raises another issue here —the issue of the relationship between history and criticism, between past and present, between the dominant and the alternative cinemas."⁶

Guerín's overall project is thus quite close to Watkins', although the Catalan filmmaker really is unique, from the point of view of both his search for a solidarity between small European countries

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The Quiet Man

and his desire to re-write the form of the ciné-essay. It's clear that Guerin wants to rediscover the European qualities of *The Quiet Man*, and *Innisfree* is basically a work that is given over to the rural and minoritarian aspects of Irish life. Guerin is, in essence reversing the much-quoted one-liner from Irish politician Mary Harney, who said in 2000 that "Spiritually, we are probably a lot closer to Boston than Berlin."⁷ Guerin's task with *Innisfree* is to bring us to his sense that politically, Ireland is a lot closer to Barcelona than to Baltimore.

Cinematically speaking, Guerin's European-regionalist sensibility is a critique not only of Ford but also of Chris Marker, especially that most celebrated essay film of them all, Marker's *Sans soleil* (1983),⁸ which integrates *Vertigo* in a way that is very close to what Guerin is doing with *The Quiet Man*. To put matters in the terms of this issue, one way of understanding *Innisfree* is as a tale of a winding and wending search for authorship. Guerin goes to Ireland to look for John Ford; what he ends up finding, though, is Chris Marker, and he doesn't necessarily accept what he finds. For what we see in *Innisfree* is (literally!) miles away from the idealistic globalism of *Sans soleil*; Guerin's vision is rooted, and doubly so. He excavates the politics, culture, history and landscape of a specific place, the west of Ireland, and does so not because the images of his travels contain the metaphorical and metaphysical resonance of Marker's footage of Iceland, Japan, Guinea-Bissau and so on, but because a semi-improvised travel documentary is a way into a place whose history is genuinely complex and often confusing. Furthermore, Guerin's perspective is not the cosmopolitan gaze so famously central to Marker's body of work, but instead a gaze that is quite distinctly Catalan. One way of understanding *Innisfree* is that it is an attempt to stop gazing at Ireland through America or Britain, as so much cinema about the Emerald Isle has long done, and instead to gaze at Ireland through Catalonia. What do you find when you gaze at Ireland neither through the lens of a Marker-esque Franco-cosmopolitanism nor through a Fordian Hollywood romanticism, but instead through then lens of European Minority culture? You find a place that is multilingual, marginal, and always politically embattled.

The Catalan Context

Catalan cinema is, among European national cinemas, fairly strong. In terms of films produced and international visibility, it is certainly the equal of Belgian cinema or Swiss cinema, and probably a bit stronger than, say, Dutch or Austrian cinema. Indeed, one useful analogy is Quebec. Some studies drop Quebec filmmaking into the larger framework of Canadian cinema and some studies of Canadian cinema simply ignore or minimise the role of films made in Quebec, despite the fact that Montreal's cinematic infrastructure is easily the equal of Toronto's and Vancouver's and the screen-share of locally produced films much greater. Much the same is true of studies of Spanish cinema, which oftentimes either ignore what goes on in Catalonia or mention it in passing as a kind of regional curiosity,⁹ even though Barcelona's infrastructure is easily the equal of Madrid's. Like small national cinemas such as Quebec's, Switzerland or Belgium's, Catalan cinema had produced a few well-known auteurs; Catalonia's Pere Portabella (who in addition to his own films was once a producer for Luis Buñuel and Carlos Saura) has a similar importance to world cinema as Quebec's Denys Arcand or Switzerland's Alain Tanner.¹⁰ Guerin, on the other hand, is a slightly more marginal figure because of his formal eccentricity, although he has no small reputation in cinephilic and film-festi-

val circles. To give a sense of this, Chris Darke, reporting from the 2011 Locarno Film Festival, wrote of Guerin's latest film *Memories of a Morning*, that "Let it be known: when it comes to the essay film, there's another JLG in town!"¹¹ In this way he is roughly analogous to Belgium's Chantal Akerman, being someone who is slightly more accessible than most avant garde filmmakers but considerably more experimental than any commercial filmmaker. Given his place on the fringe of a marginal cinema, but a still-accessible fringe of a relatively strong marginal cinema, it should come as no surprise that what Guerin goes looking for in Ireland is its sense of being a small European country, one with a delicate and sometimes contradictory relationship with the world's metropolises. What he goes looking for in Ireland, basically, is the Catalan experience.

This isn't as surprising as it might seem. *The Quiet Man*, after all, may not be a trans-national film in the exact same way that *The Journey* is, but like Watkins' film, Ford's work is basically a travel narrative. The story that Ford unfolds is that of Sean Thornton (played by his muse, John Wayne), an American who returns to his ancestral home of Ireland. He's ostensibly there in search of his heritage, but he's also in search of peace, of escape from his memories of violence (it is revealed midway through the film that during his career as a professional boxer he had killed an opponent in the ring). But Thornton quickly discovers that he is not at all at home in Ireland; he doesn't get any of the cultural cues, and relationships between men and women, especially those involving dowries, he finds especially baffling. Estrangement and the gradual, tentative reconciliation of estrangement, the gradual opening of Thornton to the genuinely foreign country that he is now part of, are the film's dominant themes. Édouard Waintrop, in a recent issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, offered a very interesting analysis of Ford's films of the 1940s and 50s, arguing that they were driven by a distinctly American form of progressivism, especially an interest in the peasant experience, which accounts for the subject matter of ostensibly quite different films such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *The Searchers* (1956) and *The Rising of the Moon* (1957).¹² Luke Gibbons also sees this in terms of national identity, writing of *The Quiet Man* that "What is at stake here... is geographical displacement, the projecting onto another territory or region of disturbing material from one's own national past—or present."¹³ You could very easily make the same assessment of *Innisfree's* displacement of national themes onto the territory of Ireland, with the pair Ford/USA giving way to Guerin/Catalonia.

This Catalan perspective is visible in the first sequences of the film. *Innisfree* starts with a series of long shots of stone walls, followed by some shots of two men walking around the ruins of a peasant cottage, talking in Irish Gaelic (hereafter just "Irish") about where windows and doors used to be. They're speaking a familiar, dialectal Irish, and they even comment on that quality of their speech. "Doras chúil" one of them says to the other as he points to the back door and uses the usual phrase for that entrance; the other one responds "doras ó thuaidh, maidir ag an am," or "north door, like we said back in the day." After about a minute, we come back to the images of these two men, but the voice, the language and the register of speech all change. The voiceover comes from Lord Killanin, *The Quiet Man's* producer, who explains, in his indubitably aristocratic English, the economic status of John Ford's (né Feeney) family: poor, rural, destined for emigration.

From the film's first moments, then, the language of land-



scape, memory, friendship, and home, is an explicitly dialectal form of Irish; the language of power and the harsh economic reality of Irish life is not even the English of Ireland (sometimes called Hiberno-English): it's the Queen's English. This relationship between Queen's English / Hiberno-English / Irish is roughly analogous to Castilian Spanish / Barcelona Spanish ("*Jo thoy de Bartholona*") / Catalan. This first sequence, then, is ostensibly about setting up the linguistic politics of Ireland, but what Guerin is doing is setting that politics up along Catalan lines. It's not that this is an inaccurate picture of the language situation in Ireland, it's just that this kind of politics is basically absent from *The Quiet Man* which is, after all, *Innisfree's* ostensible subject. *The Quiet Man* has one sequence where Maureen O'Hara's character insists she can only describe her bedroom troubles to her priest if she tells it to him in Irish, but this is basically a moment of light comedy; to say that it doesn't really engage with Ireland's linguistic politics would be a massive understatement. This lack of engagement is not really surprising; the linguistic politics of the United States, especially those of the United States of the 1950s, are completely different from those of Ireland. Ford is instead displacing the gender politics of 1950s America onto the territory of Ireland, and so it is in another way quite consistent with *The Quiet Man* that Guerin chooses instead to displace the linguistic politics of Catalonia onto that same territory. This is not exactly a critique of *The Quiet Man*, but nor is an acceptance of Ford's sense of Irish culture.

Innisfree has a very similar relationship with the struggle against the British, which is comparably present in *The Quiet Man*, and comparably acknowledged and revised by Guerin. He is performing this revision through an equally complex sound-image relationship. In a sequence shot in Pat Cohen's Bar—the same place where, in *The Quiet Man*, slightly batty IRA schemes

are being launched—Guerin presents a very long montage of close ups of old-timers telling war stories. But the stories are just fragments, bits of speech that evoke the political struggle in a most splintered way: "Maggie's army, Maggie's private army, we'd never get rid of them...."; "Four men, and I trained them in the use of arms and all that...."; "The old IRA that you're speaking of now, as we call them the old IRA, them were just a branch of the same organisation, you might say...."; "We have 800 years of persecution, with the British...." The sound is more or less synchronous, and the viewer generally (although not always) sees the person who is speaking. But the voices start to mix with one another, and the shots are all quite short. Following this sequence, though, Guerin changes language dramatically, and I mean that both in terms of spoken and film language. He cuts to a tracking shot slowly moving through a dense, green forest, and at first continues these pub stories. The shot continues (and this is a very long take) but the sound switches to the celebrated republican song *The Rising of the Moon*, which was also the title of Ford's next Irish film, of 1957. But while the song sounds familiar at first, it's not. Hibernophiles everywhere hear that tune and immediately expect to hear "For the pikes must be together at the rising of the moon," but what we hear instead is "Ní foláir na picí bheith le chéile amuigh le héirí na géalaí." This is the song's little-known Irish-language version, published in *The Gaelic Journal* at the turn of the 20th century. The artificiality of all this is underlined by the fact that this striking plan-séquence directly follows a very fast and dense montage. What these two very different sequences share, though, is a sense that the Irish history of anti-colonial struggle is actually quite dense, sometimes hard to follow and often surprising. Guerin is offering a subjective vision that underlines the romantic and heroic quality of the struggle



but also leaves room for a certain distance, a certain scepticism. History is being revealed here in all its complexity, and so it's difficult to conclude from this sequence how, exactly, this struggle can be won or even resolved. In insisting on the incomplete, unfinished quality of the history, Guerin is visualising Ireland in the terms in which he opened the film: rural landscapes, the peasant experience, a minority language. And as with that first sequence, with its complex sound-image relationship, he is not trying to offer an objective vision. The gaze in this sequence is artificial, the gaze of a stranger. It is a Catalan look at Ireland.

Something very similar is going on in a sequence about making a "hurley," the stick one uses to play hurling. Hurling is a distinctly Irish sport, being played nowhere else (except among diaspora populations); it is, more or less, field hockey crossed with baseball. This sequence begins with a montage of close-ups of an ash tree (hurleys are always made from ash) being cut by an axe, then small pieces of steel being hammered into that piece of ash. The sounds of the axe and the hammer are perfectly in synch with the image but the montage is highly rhythmic, giving an equally intense sense of mimesis and artificiality. You can even hear the slow creaking of the ash. But as in Pat Cohen's Bar, what follows this montage is a long take in the green Irish landscape. This time we are in a large field, with a man in the distance holding a hurley. The man slowly gets closer to the camera as he explains what the hurley is and demonstrates how his grandfather would defend his land with that hurley, swinging it over and over until he finally gets very close to the camera and swings at the lens. What follows this is a montage of Irish people standing holding hurleys and looking directly at the camera, with the voice of Lord Killanin explaining how Ford knew people on both sides of Ireland's civil war and had maintained his friendships with IRA people. His

Lorship's voice is followed by the song "Farewell, My Country," sung by an old woman. Again, montage is very important here, this time in a dialectical, almost Soviet way. We begin with a fast and rhythmic montage (hurley stick being made / thesis), which is followed by a moving-camera long take (man using a hurley stick used as a weapon / antithesis), concluding with the synthesis: a montage sequence of people holding hurleys, with the civil war and emigration on the soundtrack. For an Irish viewer, this subject matter is all fairly quotidian: the national sport, the country's history, emigration. But Guerin is explicitly rendering these quotidian aspects of Irishness strange by this highly constructed and highly argumentative form of montage. Indeed, these aspects of Irish life are being rendered "étrange" in the French sense of the term: strange, but also foreign. This is the cinematic voice of an artist who finds the place visually and sonically rich, but also finds it full of unresolved problems like the legacy of the Civil War and the omnipresence of emigration. We are seeing a gaze that is neither touristic nor folkloric, but a gaze that still sees the country through the lens of a foreigner who seems to find this all vaguely but no more than vaguely familiar, the lens of a Catalan.

We can also see, and hear, this Catalan sensibility very clearly in a short sequence that is, improbably, in equal parts about Maureen O'Hara and the conflict in Northern Ireland. In this sequence, an old woman is watching TV and sees a news broadcast about a confrontation between the police and nationalist militants in Belfast. The journalist, though, is speaking Irish. It is worth pointing out that Guerin is making this film in 1990, fully seven years before the establishment of an Irish-language television service. Despite the fact that Ireland's state-owned broadcaster is only known as Raidió Teilifís Éireann, it broadcasts almost entirely in English; the station would have a

few transmissions in Irish every day, but this did not amount to much more than a sliver of the broadcast day. The old woman switches the channel and to a contemporary interview with Maureen O'Hara, in which she talks about how she's been honoured in countless countries but never until now "in the country where I was born," Ireland. The old woman growls at the TV: "that's stupid... such nonsense...." What we're seeing here is another kind of dialectic, one that mixes the political turmoil of Northern Ireland with the glamour of Irish-American celebrity. The first one speaks Irish, the second one speaks English. But only a Catalan would see things this way. The nationalist/Republican side in Northern Ireland is certainly attached to Irish, which we can see not only in the very name of the political party Sinn Féin (Irish for "we ourselves") but also in that party's great interest in language policy. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland is not a story of a conflict between Irish speakers and English speakers. It's not really even the story of a conflict between a widely bilingual population and another population who speak only the dominant language, even though those, with his combination of Irish and English ("that's stupid... such nonsense...."), are the terms that Guerin is presenting it here. He's presenting it in those terms because that *is* the story of the political conflict in Catalonia. Roughly 14% of the population of Northern Ireland reports some knowledge of Irish,¹⁴ but in Spanish Catalonia,¹⁵ 91% of the population reports some knowledge of Catalan.¹⁶ Most Irish people understand the northern conflict as a matter of either religious or national differences, not linguistic ones. The Irish language is present in some of these debates, but it's hardly ever central. But it's impossible to ignore the linguistic centrality of the conflict between Spaniards and Catalans. Seeing the Northern Ireland conflict in terms of language is, basically, to see the conflict in Catalan terms.

The Essayistic Context

So far I've been talking mostly about historical and political issues, but Guerin is also imposing a kind of Catalan gaze through how he critiques the essay film's tendency to eclipse or

minimise regional matters in favour of more global perspectives. *The Quiet Man* is certainly at the heart of *Innisfree*, but there's no doubt that Chris Marker's celebrated essay film *Sans soleil* is also present.¹⁷ *Sans soleil* is, at first glance, quite close to what Guerin is doing here. Marker is travelling to better understand his obsession with *Vertigo*,¹⁸ just as Guerin is travelling to better understand his obsession with *The Quiet Man*. But Guerin replaces Marker's introspective internationalism with a desire to meditate on the ambiguities and complexity of a distinctly Irish landscape. Marker goes to San Francisco, but in this dense, complex urban landscape, he only finds *Vertigo*, just as he relentlessly finds the themes of *Vertigo* in Iceland, Japan and Guinea-Bissau. Guerin is travelling in Ireland in order to discover a culture, and moreover a politics, that is *absent* in *The Quiet Man*. Marker voyages far and wide in order to find, more or less, his own interiority. Guerin is doing the exact opposite: he puts himself in a place, the west of Ireland, and discovers political histories and cultural landscapes that are truly vertiginous.

The sequence of *Sans soleil* shot in Guinea-Bissau is crucial for understanding the difference between Guerin and Marker. This begins with a montage of people in Guinea-Bissau going about daily life, with Marker's female alter-ego saying in voice over that "They did what they could, they freed themselves, they chased out the Portuguese. They traumatized the Portuguese army to such an extent that it gave rise to a movement that overthrew the dictatorship, and led one for a moment to believe in a new revolution in Europe. Who remembers all that?"¹⁹ Marker also returns again and again to the legacy of Amílcar Cabral, the hero-martyr of Guinea-Bissau's struggle for independence; the narration sings his praises, and he appears on screen. Through images and texts like these, we can see and hear the film's real perspective, which evokes memories of a Third World revolution that seemed to promise to somehow redeem Europe as well. But we are always approaching this *memory*, through what cannot be experienced anymore or even satisfactorily recreated, through what is *absent*. This is what brings Marker back to *Vertigo*, which has these very impossibilities at its heart. During a montage of close-ups of the

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faces of Guinean soldiers, the narrator only speaks of memory: "And beneath each of these faces a memory. And in place of what we were told had been forged into a collective memory, a thousand memories of men who parade their personal laceration in the great wound of history." These moments evince a real political commitment, but one that's always enunciated in a personal, subjective voice; this is not a collective memory but a series of individual ones. I've already tried to demonstrate how important subjectivity is for Guerin as well, but the difference for the Catalan filmmaker lies in his desire to present issues in a focussed way, a way that makes the not only the subjective frame and the historical context explicit, but is also very clear about the contemporary quality of the images on the screen. Marker's Guinea-Bissauians are memories, icons of a struggle. This is not at all the case with the Irish people of *Innisfree*.

This is clearest in a montage sequence that is so close to a scene in *Sans soleil* as to feel like a reference to it. When Marker is on Fogo Island (this one part of the former Portuguese colony of Cape Verde, not Newfoundland!), he gives us a montage of the faces of dockers, each one of whom directly looks at the camera, sometimes in close up and sometimes in long shot, but always against a concrete wall. The narrator describes them as "a people of wanderers, of navigators, of world travelers. They fashioned themselves through cross-breeding here on these rocks that the Portuguese used as a marshaling yard for their colonies. A people of nothing, a people of emptiness, a vertical people. Frankly, have you ever heard of anything stupider than to say to people as they teach in film schools, not to look at the camera?" As with the people of Guineau-Bissau, these dockers are symbols of the search for a postcolonial culture. The earlier voiceover reminded us of the legacy of Amilcar Cabral, but here the tone is less one of someone trying to find a wondrous inheritance than someone trying to make peace with the reality of what he finds in these places. In both cases, it is Marker's voice that is changing tone; the game of having his voiceover read by a woman does nothing to conceal the completely personal quality of every aspect of *Sans Soleil*. Indeed, he is presenting these dockers as versions of himself, as wandering cosmopoli-

tans. Guerin also gives us a montage of Irish young people, in close up and long shot, standing against a concrete wall, looking right at the camera. But these young people are not "empty" or "vertical," even though are clearly, like the people of Fogo Island, coming up with postcolonial culture defined by cultural mixture. Guerin makes their non-emptiness (so to speak) even more clear by having their own voices on the soundtrack, each one recounting their favourite scene from *The Quiet Man* in their own words ("my favourite bit is the bar, when they had the fight at the bar, in at the bar"), cross-cut with stills and excerpts from the film. This kids aren't "vertical" in this Markerian sense, even if they are getting some sense of themselves from the remnants of the colonising culture that is Hollywood. Guerin, as with Marker, is engaging with the politics of the country that he is shooting in, and engaging with the global context of that political as well (classically imperial for Marker, Hollywoodian for Guerin). But for Guerin, and this is crucial, none of this is a matter of symbolism or iconography. These Irish young people speak for themselves, in their own voices, and that's the reason that they are looking at the camera; it is simple and instinctive for Guerin, not a matter of thumbing your nose at a film school convention. *Innisfree* is a highly subjective but still highly detailed effort to understand Ireland at the end of the 1980s, to find out what it looked like, what it sounded like, what its political memory was, what its ciné-memory was. Marker follows his sequence on Fogo with a moving-camera sequence-shot taken in the Sahel desert, among the petrified skeletons of carnival animals; the voiceover tells us "the Sahel is not only what is shown of it when it is too late; it's a land that drought seeps into like water into a leaking boat. The animals resurrected for the time of a carnival in Bissau will be petrified again, as soon as a new attack has changed the savannah into a desert. This is a state of survival that the rich countries have forgotten." Guerin's montage sequence, though, is followed by a different kind of sequence-shot, one of a very different landscape: he simply inserts the last image of *The Quiet Man*, where Maureen O'Hara and John Wayne hug, kiss and return together to their little cottage. These images are

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now, like those carnival animals, petrified: too romantic, too distant from the reality of a small country at Europe's margins. But Guerin is also showing how these petrified images do still live, in a way that is not so far from the carnivals of Guinea-Bissau. They live in the popular memory, in the memory of the young people who still want to conserve them, and who still find pleasure in conserving them, even though they refuse to be fully re-made by the way those images distort their daily lives. That is also a kind of survival that rich countries tend to forget.

Conclusion

The presence of *The Quiet Man* at the heart of *Innisfree* makes it clear that Guerin is on a quest to find John Ford's Ireland; what he also finds, though, is Chris Marker's essay film. He is nostalgic for and critical of both authors in equal measure. *Innisfree*'s real accomplishment, though, is to have found in these Hollywood images and essayistic structures the possibility of an Ireland that is marginal, politically complex, and linked to other small European countries, Catalonia being the most obvious example. What Guerin finds in his marginal, bilingual and European country doesn't really exist in *The Quiet Man*, any more than Chris Marker's melancholy about global revolution really exists in *Vertigo*. As with Marker, Guerin uses a classic Hollywood film as a point of departure; he explicitly and repeatedly invokes it, but he is tracing his own route. *Innisfree*'s other real accomplishment, then, is to find in the form of the film essay the possibility of genuinely confronting a place, its population, and its collective memory, all in a detailed, precise but still completely subjective way. To return to Ken Nolley's sense of why both *The Journey* and *The Quiet Man* are important, *Innisfree* is confronting "the issue of the relationship between history and criticism, between past and present, between the dominant and the alternative cinemas." Even though both Catalan cinema and José Luis Guerin are becoming more and more celebrated on the international festival circuit, *Innisfree* is not at all well-known in Ireland or North America. This is a shame, because the film really does bring to the fore very current debates about the essay film,²⁰ to say nothing of debates about Catalonia's place in a rapidly changing Europe.²¹ For those who want to dance at the crossroads of romanticism and political engagement, dominant and alternative cinemas, industrial and artisanal approaches to filmmaking, *Innisfree* and its Catalan vision of Ireland could scarcely be more timely.

Notes

- 1 Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.71.
- 2 Most of Quinn's major films can be ordered on DVD through his website www.conamara.org. Comerford's work is harder to come by, although The Museum of Modern Art's Circulating Film and Video Library holds a 16mm copy of *Down the Corner* (a 16mm copy of Quinn's *Poitin* is also in this collection).
- 3 Bob Quinn, "What Happened to the Bishop?," *Film Ireland* 39 (February/March 1993), p.8.
- 4 This is available on DVD (PAL, region 2) as part of the box set "José Luis Guerin," published by Versus Entertainment. All the discs are subtitles in English, French and Spanish, and are available at: <http://www.versusent.es/> or at <http://goo.gl/IgER9>
- 5 Ken Nolley, "Reconsidering *The Quiet Man*," *CineAction* 9 (1987), p.15.
- 6 *Ibid*, p.19. It is worth noting that *The Journey* is one of the films that renowned Canadian documentarians Peter Wintonick and Marc Achbar both worked on early in their careers. That film, for obvious reasons of length, is hard to see these days. Chicago's Facets Multimedia (www.facets.org) used to rent a VHS copy of the complete film. The 16mm copy of the complete film can still be rented from San Francisco's Canyon Cinema: www.canyoncinema.com. Nolley also wrote about *The Journey* for this very journal; see his "Making *The Journey* with Peter Watkins," *CineAction* 12 (1987), pp. 3-11.

- 7 Mary Harney was Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) of the Republic of Ireland and a member of the now-defunct liberal (in the European sense of free-market/laissez-faire) party Progressive Democrats. The full text of her speech is available at the website of the Republic's Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; see <http://goo.gl/vyyYw>.
- 8 *CineAction* has published two essays on *Sans Soleil*. See Janine Marchessault, "Sans Soleil," *CineAction* 5 (1986), pp.2-6 and Michael Walsh, "Around the World, Across the Frontiers: *Sans Soleil* as *Depays*," *CineAction* 18 (1989), pp.29-36.
- 9 That's true of two books that I generally find quite useful but which devote very little space to Catalan cinema: Marcia Kinder's *Blood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Román Gubern et.al.'s *Histoire de cine español* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1995).
- 10 See, for example, Jonathan Rosenbaum's essay "Portabella and Continuity," in his *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp.131-138. See also Rubén Hernández, *Pere Portabella: hacia una política del relato cinematográfico* (Madrid: Errata naturae editores, 2008).
- 11 Chris Darke, "Festivals: Locarno," *Film Comment* 47:6 (November/December 2011), p.67.
- 12 Édouard Waintrop, "Hollywood, l'époque héroïque," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (May 2012), p.31.
- 13 Luke Gibbons, *Ireland Into Film 6: The Quiet Man* (Cork/Dublin: Cork University Press / Film Institute of Ireland, 2002), p.51.
- 14 According to the 2001 census, the figure is 167,490 out of a total population of 1,167,957. The census figures can be seen at <http://goo.gl/K0p2L>. Northern Ireland had a census in 2011 but language figures are not yet available.
- 15 I'm excluding Catalan-speaking territories in other countries. The principal-ity of Andorra has Catalan as its only official language. Catalan is also spoken in the south of France as well as the Italian city of Alghero (L'Alguer in Catalan).
- 16 According to the 2007 census, the figure is 6,610,000 out of a total population of 7,210,508. The census figures can be seen at <http://goo.gl/WYi3Q>.
- 17 Chris Marker died on 29 July 2012. *Cahiers du cinéma* published a special section on his work in no. 681 (September 2012); the Quebec film magazine *24 Images* published a special section on the essay film in no. 159 (October-November 2012) that dealt extensively with his work (especially André Habib's lead essay "Marker et les temps de l'essai"). Not as much has appeared in English; *Film Comment*, for instance, published a short obituary by Chris Darke in 48:5 (September/October 2012), a contribution that paled in comparison to their own massive two-part special section on Marker, published in 39:3 and 39:4 (2003). The best English-language piece commemorating Marker that I know of was Colin McCabe's obituary written for the 7 August 2012 issue of *The Independent*.
- 18 Marker has explained his fascination with the film in a long, slightly mad text originally published in *Positif*'s special issue "Le cinéma vu par les cineastes," a part of which became a special issue of Faber and Faber's annual publication *Projections*. See Chris Marker, "A Free Replay (notes sur « Vertigo »)," *Positif* 400 (1994), pp.79-84 and Chris Marker, "A Free Replay (notes on Vertigo)," *Projections* 4½ (1995), pp.123-130.
- 19 The English text of the film is available in full at www.markertext.com, specifically at <http://goo.gl/1MgRj>. The French text of the film is available as a PDF from a site hosted by the Université de Nancy 2, at <http://goo.gl/Hf5oW>; it was also published as Chris Marker, "Sans Soleil," *Trafic* 6 (Spring 1993), pp.79-97.
- 20 This concept has generated a lot of scholarly interest lately, in no small part because of the publication of Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montage, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Laura Rascoroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009). For me, the seminal statements on the essay film, in no small part because of their clarity, predate these books by almost two decades. See Philip Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," in his *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically* (New York: Anchor, 1998), pp. 280-311 (originally published in *The Threepenny Review* 48, 1992) and Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Orson Welles's Essay Films and Documentary Fictions: A Two-Part Speculation," in his *Placing Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp.171-183 (originally published in *Cineatograph* 4, 1991). All of this is philosophically indebted to Alexandre Astruc's 1948 essay "The Birth of a New Avant Grade: The Caméra-Stylo," reprinted in Peter Graham, ed., *The New Wave* (London: Doubleday, 1968), pp.17-23; the French original of that essay is reprinted in Astruc, *Du stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo: écrits (1942-1984)* (Paris: l'Archipel, 1992), pp. 324-328.
- 21 The Catalan elections of 25 November 2012 were won by the social-democratic and "soft nationalist" group *Convergència i Unió*, who planned to form a coalition with the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, known in English as the Republican Left. Many observers believe that this will lead to a referendum on independence in the very near future.

Dostoevsky's Journey to Iran



A Separation

By ANTON OLEINIK

The discrete charm of Asghar Farhadi's movies represents a puzzle. They have a broad appeal both in Iran and the West, receiving accolades from movie-goers and professional critics. *A Separation* (2011) won a 2012 Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film of the Year, a 2012 César for the Meilleur Film étranger, a 2011 Golden Berlin Bear—to cite just a few of several dozen national and international awards. *About Elly* (2009) won a 2011 Silver Berlin Bear for the Best Director, along with more than a dozen prizes. *Fireworks Wednesday* (2006) received three awards at the Iranian national Fajr Film Festival in 2006 and a 2006 Gold Hugo at the Chicago International Film Festival. *Beautiful City* (2004) and *Dancing in the Dust* (2003) each won four international awards and one national.

There is no easy explanation for this puzzle. Farhadi's movies are well received both at home and abroad, especially in the West. Thus, attempts to make a dissident of him should be taken with a grain of salt. Farhadi—as we see him through his movies—is, rather, someone who deeply appreciates traditional Iranian culture and Islam instead of offering a look at this country that could easily catch a Western eye. For instance, the full-length animation movie *Persopolis* (2007) based on a book by Marjane Satrapi, an Iranian immigrant living in Western Europe, lies closer to the format of an Iranian story adapted for the Western audience.

References to progressively increasing tensions around the Islamic Republic of Iran and the real risk of an all-out military confrontation between Iran, on the one hand, and Israel and eventually the US, on the other, do not serve to explain the broad popularity of his works either. There is nothing in them about the Iranian nuclear program, the government remains almost invisible in the background (yet make no mistake: 'one does not tell lies to police', as a character in *About Elly* puts it) and men in uniform have perfectly human faces. Sometimes they are even willing to make concessions to those in their order (as in an episode in the courthouse shown in *A Separation*

or several episodes with a prison guard helping a former inmate in *Beautiful City*).

Perhaps his success can be attributed to a detailed, ethnographical account of everyday life in a country that remains out of the reach of most Western travelers? Few outsiders could get an inside look at the Soviet Union (when it still existed) or North Korea (until now), which made the culture of such closed societies exotic and, for that reason, attractive for some. If Farhadi was not born as a filmmaker and scriptwriter, he could well have become an excellent ethnologist or social anthropologist, paying attention to the most banal details of everyday life (think of an episode on using toilets in *About Elly*—this aspect of culture rarely attracts the attention of even professional social scientists,ⁱ or about his watchful observation of driving habits in Iran in *Fireworks Wednesday*, which also struck me when visiting Teheran in 2007) and developing capacity to unveil what is hidden beyond appearances (namely, sexuality hidden beyond a strictly imposed dress code: *Beautiful City*, *Fireworks Wednesday* and *Dancing in the Dust* offer telling illustrations).

In Farhadi's works (especially in *A Separation*, *Fireworks Wednesday* and *Beautiful City*), legal scholars would find a wealth of information on how the legal system in Iran (and, speaking more broadly, in Shia Islam) really works—in a very different manner indeed.ⁱⁱ For instance, anyone with experience dealing with the legal profession in common-law countries would be astonished by the relative narrowness of the distance—physical and symbolical—that separates the parties from the judge, by the practice of paying a significant monetary compensation—'blood money'—to relatives of a victim as an alternative to a prison term and by the informal style of the arguments brought before the court. The letter of the law matters, which sets the system of justice described above from its historical predecessor, qadi justice.ⁱⁱⁱ Qadi acts without special formal guidance. However, the circumstances of a particular case and especially the interpersonal relationships between the

parties (even if offered blood money, the relatives of a victim may refuse it and ask the court for a prison term) matter as much as the letter of the law.

The ethnological and anthropological richness of Farhadi's views do not serve to explain the general public's interest in his movies however. After all, those who teach (or take) courses on Iranian culture, Islam or comparative legal systems represent a tiny minority of the audience for Farhadi's movies in the West. As of March 2012, *A Separation* was shown on 280 plus screens in the US only. What keeps the general public in the movie theaters? There is no 'show' as per Western standards, most of the action takes place in a limited space (a villa needing repair at the Caspian seaside in *About Elly*, an upper middle-class apartment in *A Separation* and *Fireworks Wednesday*) and the movies are produced with very limited budgets: IMDb.com estimates the budget for *A Separation* at \$800,000.^{iv}

I think the search for genuineness, sincerity in human relations—lost or being lost—explains the broad appeal of Farhadi's movies. His movies are nothing other than a statement of the problem that is made in a highly intelligent, suggestive as opposed to assertive manner. The fact that the artist does not offer a solution helps as well. None of the movies has a happy ending. None of them has a clear indication as to whether a broken relationship is going to be repaired (between Nader and Simin in *A Separation*, between Mozhdé Samiei and Morteza in *Fireworks Wednesday*). Farhadi refuses to offer a clear answer—either because it simply does not exist or because any particular answer, Muslim or Western, would alienate a significant part of his viewers. The *Persopolis*, offering a Western recipe as to how to find 'paradise lost', met with a lukewarm reception at the home of its scriptwriter, in Iran. Farhadi is widely respected both at home and abroad.

Marriage does not work any more, at least in the way it supposedly worked in the past. Brief moments of people being happy together and enjoying the company of each other around the clock—they mark the start of a relationship (so nicely pictured in the episode of a motorbike ride in the mountains in *Fireworks Wednesday*)—subsequently turn into days of mutual alienation, misunderstanding and mistrust. Endless quarrels between spouses, adulteries, temporary separations that end up being a first step toward a true separation constitute the integral elements of the everyday life of many couples, in Iran and elsewhere. The problem rings a bell for Farhadi's compatriots as well as for viewers in Western Europe and North America.

Without being able or willing to offer a solution to this sad transformation of marriage, Farhadi is trying to locate its roots. If one watches Farhadi's movies as pieces of a single picture, then one of its roots is found in the process of progressive individualization as an integral component of what the social sciences folks call 'modernization'. Having an anthropological eye, Farhadi peers through the wall of various houses: those of the poor (in *Dancing in the Dust*, *Beautiful City* and *Fireworks Wednesday*) and those of the relatively well-off (by the Iranian standards at least, in *Fireworks Wednesday*, *About Elly* and *A Separation*). The closer one lives to Tehran and the better one is off in pecuniary terms, the fewer chances there are of remaining loyal to the spirit of the 'happy motorbike ride in the mountains'.

Instead of trying to make sense of this regularity in Farhadi's works by pointing to his own origins (he was born and began his career in cinema in Esfahan—a provincial city), I propose to explain it by referring to the process of progressive individualiza-

tion. Neither large communities nor such micro-social units as families manage to escape its devastating effects. The former are eaten by the worm of mistrust (as shown in the episode of *Fireworks Wednesday* with Roohi, a young cleaning lady from a poor neighborhood attempting to enter a 'gated community' in Tehran to do her job: no local is willing to let her in without her employers' authorization—'who knows what you are going to do here'). The latter stopped to transform the lives of two (or more, counting children) into a common life (a local *res publica*).

From this point of view, Farhadi is a conservative. His conservatism could be better understood not in the sense of being a Muslim fundamentalist or a member of a conservative (in the Western or Iranian political coordinates) movement, but in the sense of being uneasy with outcomes and byproducts of the process of modernization. Hence, Farhadi's ambivalence toward the West as the embodiment of modernity: it promises a more comfortable life (symbolized with the help of home appliance packaging boxes and the central place occupied by a washing machine in the kitchen of Nader and Simin's apartment) yet devoid of emotional 'togetherness'. The upper middle-class Iranians in Farhadi's movies drive European cars, have comfortable apartments with satellite dishes (to catch international TV channels not censored by the government), freely travel abroad for holidays (or to the Caspian seaside if it is simply a long weekend). Their children learn English, along with other foreign languages, at school. Yet their family lives tend to be dysfunctional. They feel 'separated' or, to use a stronger expression, 'alienated' from one another.

Farhadi's conservatism is similar to the conservatism of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Neither of them has any sympathy for fundamentalism of any kind. Yet both see the 'dark side' of the process of modernization and the emergence of capitalism as its culmination (the free market economy in the Western sense does not exist in today's Iran, yet it takes the form of a flourishing extralegal economy as exemplified by a beauty salon run by Morteza's neighbor—and lover—Simin in *Fireworks Wednesday*).

Dostoevsky wrote about alienation in human relationships at the time of a 'first' Russian capitalist modernization (the second half of the 19th century). He still has an army of readers both at home, in Russia (experiencing a 'second' capitalist modernization these days) and abroad. Farhadi's major focus refers to modernization in Iran. So far it takes hidden forms, left unnoticed by an untrained eye. Who knows, maybe tomorrow the Iranian modernization will take more explicit forms. Regardless of its forms, the problem of people becoming more and more 'separated' from one another (including their spouses and parents) reminds and will probably continue to remind us about the price paid for material comfort. In other words, Dostoevsky and Farhadi will continue to find enough interested readers and viewers.

Parallels between Dostoevsky and Farhadi can be found even in particular details of their works. Both started by looking inside prison, one of the first inventions of modernity according to Michel Foucault.^v Dostoevsky wrote *The House of the Dead* (1861). This novel marked his turn from early sympathies to revolutionaries to a conservative stance that characterizes the late Dostoevsky. Farhadi peers through the prison walls in one of his first movies, *Beautiful City*.

Both artists work in the genre of thriller probably finding it the most appropriate for discussing the 'evils' of the growing 'separation'. Even particular characters have some similarities,



About Elly

for instance the investigator in *The Crime and Punishment* (1866) by Dostoevsky and the interrogator in *A Separation* by Farhadi. The investigator—an embodiment of the state—appears highly intelligent and in a sense ‘all mighty’. One has better chances of going unnoticed when cheating on his wife than when confronting the investigator.

Both artists employ a particular technique for constructing a plot, namely they place their principal characters in critical situations in which one cannot rely on routines. Mikhail Bakhtin notices that most of Dostoevsky’s characters are living and acting ‘on the edge’ (*na poroge*)—they have ‘a life detached from the life’.^{vi} The characters in Farhadi’s plots are placed in similar situations: events following a young woman’s drawing, a web of unlikely relationships emerging in a prison milieu (because they include a prison guard) at the wake for the upcoming execution of a young criminal, events caused by what is initially believed to be a criminal abortion (defined in the Iranian Penal Code as instances of hitting, beating, and bothering of a pregnant woman that result in a miscarriage, a snake hunt in a desert and so forth. By observing behavior in critical situations, the two artists are better able to uncover the true nature of their characters (they both desperately search for genuineness in human relations!) because it cannot be hidden anymore behind the protective shield of routine. Emphasis on masterfully (I would even say mathematically—in the sense of mathematical precision) constructed critical situations also explains why there are several ‘truths’ in each of their works and there is no single and universally acceptable point of reference.^{vii} Everything becomes relative in critical situations.

Farhadi notably invokes the West as the symbol of modernity when constructing his critical situations. An Iranian living in Germany and looking for an opportunity to be introduced to Elly (who is engaged, yet does not want to continue the relationship with her fiancé) asked his friends to take her to their long weekend at the Caspian seaside in *About Elly*. The situation in which everyone is telling lies (because of Elly’s status of an engaged woman) ends up by her incidental drawing. Simin’s desire to emigrate because she does not see any future for her daughter Termeh in this country turns out to be a first step in a

long and painful process of *A Separation*. Well, the separation started before Simin got an opportunity to apply for a long-term visa, yet issuing the visa triggered a host of problems thus creating a critical situation.

Some readers may conclude that this reviewer is attempting to tell us an age-old story of the ‘Evil West’ as pictured by Islamic fundamentalists and other enemies of globalization and modernization, thereby accusing Farhadi of doing the same. They would miss the entire point in my argument then. The broad appeal of Farhadi’s movies can be better understood by his quest for the genuineness in human relations. His fellow travelers are not mullahs or uncritical adepts of ‘modern values’ but Dostoevsky and a number of other decent people (non-metropolitan French novelist and philosopher Alber Camus, Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, French-Canadian filmmaker Denys Arcand to name just a few). It would be nice to be able to take a motorbike ride in the mountains feeling so close to the person sitting next to you, yet neither the traditionalist past nor the modern future leave much room for remaining sincere and genuine in relationships even with those within arm’s reach. So, the journey must continue.

NOTES

- 1 Differences in using toilets as a manifestation of clashes between cultures was insightfully spotted by *The Globe and Mail*’s reporter Graeme Smith in Afghanistan (see, for instance, Smith, G., ‘Men in battle: When a brotherly bond turns deadly’, *The Globe and Mail*, January 20, 2012).
- 2 See, for instance, a review focusing on this particular aspect of the movie *A Separation* written by Rollo Roming for *The New Yorker*: www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2012/02/a-separation-iran-law.html. Leo Robson also focuses on elements of a ‘courtroom thriller’ in his review of *A Separation* for *The Times Literary Supplement* (July 15, 2011) titled ‘A different class of dispute’.
- 3 Matza, D. *Delinquency and Drift*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990, pp. 118-120.
- 4 www.imdb.com/title/tt1832382/business.
- 5 Foucault, M. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- 6 Bakhtin, M. *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* [Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics], Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971, c. 201.
- 7 Bakhtin calls Dostoevsky’s novels ‘polyphonic’ for that reasons: each character has his/her own take on the situation that exists along with that of the author (*Ibid.*, c. 33-62).

MACHINES for Acting

SOVIET CONSTRUCTIVIST THEATRE
AND THE USE OF VERTICAL SPACE
IN THE FILMS OF JOSEPH LOSEY

By PETER JAMESON

In the opening minutes of Losey's 1960 British feature *The Criminal*, newly-received convict Kelly (Kenneth Cope) is being returned to the prison where he has earlier betrayed a fellow inmate, causing his death. Kelly is terrified of what the other prisoners will do in revenge. The building, painstakingly rendered on the Merton Park Studios set, is an archetypal British Victorian jail. Open ironwork balustrades, banisters and stairways cut diagonally across converging vertical and horizontal planes. A steel mesh barrier covers the ground floor, turning the prisoners' association area into a caged pit. The environment generates a mixture of claustrophobia and paranoia, as the prison's occupants are both contained and open to surveillance from all angles.

The physical use of vertical space in this sequence and the way in which camera and actors move within that space are characteristic of Losey's filmmaking. The roots of this aspect of his cinematic technique can be found in early twentieth century theatre, exemplified by the Soviet constructivist theories of stage director Vsevolod Meyerhold. In the 1930s, before Losey embarked on his film career, he worked as a theatre director in New York City. In 1935 he visited the Soviet Union and attended classes and rehearsals run by Meyerhold. He brought back to the United States ideas and concepts which he would first employ on the New York stage, notably in his two federally-funded Living Newspaper productions in 1936. Later, when he began his Hollywood career with *The Boy With Green Hair* (1948), he would begin to find ways to adapt these theories to fit his own cinematic style.

Losey's film career is generally divided up by critics into chronological segments, starting with his Hollywood "social conscience" features from 1948 to 1951. He was then subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee and went into voluntary exile from the United States, settling in London in 1953. His work as a British-based genre journeyman covers 1954 to 1962, when the French-Italian co-production *Eva* was released. This, and the first of his three films scripted by Harold Pinter, *The Servant* (1963), contributed to the third Losey period, where he was widely regarded as a UK-based "arthouse" director. From 1972, he worked in different parts of Europe, taking on the mantle of peripatetic European "auteur". His final film was a UK produc-



The Criminal: Kelly (Kenneth Cope) arrives in Block B.

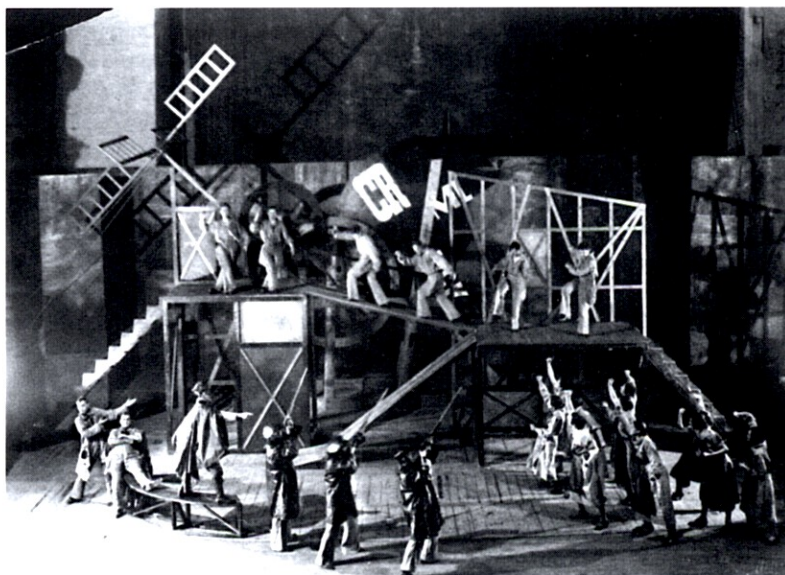
tion, an adaptation of Nell Dunn's stage play *Steaming* (1985). With Losey's work covering such a wide variety of theme, genre and location, it is perhaps unsurprising that he would be accused of unevenness and stylistic incongruity. However, a different reading emerges if Losey is seen as a man who developed a distinctive and pervasive film language based on early twentieth-century stage design and performance concepts. The films exhibit a consistency and formal integrity when their common strands are traced back to the director's theatrical antecedents. This article examines one such strand, that of his use of vertical space. It explores Losey's connection to Meyerhold, and examines a further link to Sergei Eisenstein—a very different filmmaker, but one whose theatrical beginnings cover some of the same ground as Losey's. Particular similarities between the two directors' early films add weight to the contention that both were influenced in their styles of cinema by the Soviet constructivist stage.

In the sequence from *The Criminal*, Kelly is brought into Block B through an entrance on the first-floor gallery, overlooking the prisoners who are sharing association time in the pit below. With Kelly are the ineffectual governor (Noel Willman) and the Machiavellian chief warden, Barrows, played by an icily composed Patrick Magee. The block falls silent as the men, penned in like animals, stare up at Kelly, heightening the volatile atmosphere. A close-up of the block kingpin, Johnny Bannion (Stanley Baker), is followed by a reverse close-up of Kelly. Bannion is clearly the man the new inmate fears the most. In a cut back to the gallery, Barrows grabs Kelly's lapel and propels him forward. Bannion reappears, again in close-up. He purses his lips and breaks the silence, whistling a whimsical melody which begins as the *Laurel and Hardy* theme, then segues into a children's tune which accompanies a long shot, the camera tracking back as Kelly moves towards the stairs—still transfixed by the men below—followed by Barrows. As they turn into the staircase, Bannion holds a comically discordant note. Kelly turns to look at Barrows beseechingly and Barrows propels him down the iron stairs as the inmates below laugh derisively. The camera, on a crane alongside the staircase, follows Kelly down, then moves in for a close-up as he halts a few steps above the ground. He turns, looking back up, terrified. Barrows descends behind him and then past him, into the pit, where he walks among the prisoners with impunity; he and the trusty, Scout (Jack Rodney), are seen to be the two characters most comfortable at all levels in the jail. The clueless governor, meanwhile, remains behind at the gallery level. His physical position above the prisoners, rather than emphasising his dominance over them, only underlines his remoteness and impotence. After an exchange with Bannion about Kelly's return to the block, Barrows crosses back across the association area and up the stairs. The camera is angled so that Barrows begins the climb on the right of the screen, with Kelly cowering just left of centre. As Barrows moves upwards and diagonally towards the left, he first obscures Kelly, then ends up in a dominant position above him and on the left of the screen. He stops and turns. Kelly panics and tries to run back up to safety, but a hand reaches out from between the iron banisters to stop him. He walks backwards helplessly into the pit. The hand is not a guard's; it is protruding from the cuff of a prisoner's uniform. Kelly has passed from one jurisdiction to another, and now he belongs to the men in the pit. The framing, the cinematography and the actors' movement have jointly pinpointed the moment where Barrows hands him over.

The physical space is used tightly and rigorously to develop the narrative and emotional processes of the story. Moreover, the sequence is choreographed, shot and edited as a kind of commentary on the unfolding power dynamics—albeit a partly ironic commentary, as in the case of the governor's lofty position. Such cohesion of story and use of space is characteristic of Losey's filmmaking style, with its origins traceable to his early career in the theatre.

He developed a love for theatre while at Dartmouth College in the 1920s. After graduation, the twenty-one-year-old Losey went to New York City in 1930, and obtained work as a reviewer, as well as some stage management and minor acting. He soon became close to John Hammond, then in the early days of a lifetime patronage of jazz and popular music. Hammond was from a wealthy family, and supported Losey financially in his early directorial projects, which were about child abuse, slavery, and politically motivated miscarriages of justice—the sort of “social conscience” themes later characteristic of Losey's Hollywood films. The plays were not commercially successful, and in 1935 Losey, “disillusioned,” he said, “after failure in the theatre at the ripe age of 25”, borrowed \$500 to buy a third-class return ticket to Europe.¹ His final destination was the Soviet Union, at that time a cultural magnet for European artists.

Theatre theorist Erwin Piscator was in the country trying to organise a conference of anti-fascist, left-wing theatre directors, and Losey found himself in the company of several prominent figures from the European stage, among them Bertolt Brecht. Losey had been embracing non-traditional theatre influences since at least his Dartmouth days, and crossing the Atlantic to meet the fountainheads of such ideas would have a crystallising effect on his work. He attended Meyerhold's classes and visited rehearsals of his production of *The Lady of the Camellias*.² Since 1921, Meyerhold had been director of the State Higher Theatre Workshops, where his concept of set design and performance embraced the quintessentially Soviet constructivist movement—what Robert Hughes describes as “dialectics made concrete.”³



“A machine for acting”: Liubov Popova's set design for Meyerhold's 1921 production of Fernand Crommelynck's *The Magnanimous Cuckold*.

Innovative set design was a hallmark of Meyerhold's workshop. His 1921 production of Fernand Crommelynck's *The Magnanimous Cuckold* featured a landmark constructivist set design by Liubov Popova. It was conceived, writes Marjorie L. Hoover, "after the constructivist axiom that art must abolish itself from within in favour of the machine and the factory". She adds: "The 'machine for acting,' as in the general enthusiasm for machines it was called, provided them with a jungle gym for mocking the bourgeois passion of jealousy."⁴

One of Meyerhold's former students, Nikolai Okhlopkov, impressed Losey during his Soviet visit with his "in the round" configuration for the Realistic Theatre. "Okhlopkov had a central stage with runways all around and stairs going up to second-level runways, but it was adjustable for each production. It was an opening up for me, this technique of using the audience and involving them in the production." (Losey, quoted in Ciment 1985: 37).⁵ It seems that Losey recorded no such reflections on his attendance at Meyerhold's classes and rehearsals, but a strong idea of what he witnessed can be gleaned from contemporary accounts of the production. One of these comes from Eisenstein, who worked at the Meyerhold Workshop before becoming a filmmaker. He analysed the production design in an unfinished handbook on Meyerhold's art. Hoover describes Eisenstein's notes on the production design, in which diagrams highlight the use of diagonal lines across the stage and semi-circles designating height. The love plot is launched in "a visually and psychologically heightened moment." She adds:

The semi-circle downstage right in Eisenstein's diagram of Scene 4 (Act II) designates no literal height but the important moment of Marguerite's decision to give up her city life and go with Armand to the country. The semi-circle encompassing the whole stage in Scene 6 (Act IV) indicates physical height, the ellipse of the metal staircase, and the psychologically climactic moment when Armand hurls the money he has won at gambling down into the face of the prostitute he now considers Marguerite to be. (1988: 190)

Robert Leach describes this latter scene, with Armand speaking slowly as he descends the staircase, taking one step at the end of each sentence. "It seemed like choreographed cruelty."⁶

Meyerhold was a master of combining movement and the treatment of space with psychological motivation and narrative force. His expertise in merging the concrete staging with the plasticity of the actor creates an intense dramatic effect, heightened by the use of the vertical plane. This approach would come to characterise Losey's film style, exemplified in the sequence from *The Criminal* described above; he used the strategy throughout his filmmaking career. A similar approach evident in Eisenstein's theatre and early film work, discussed later in this article, suggests a shared succession from Meyerhold. Metal staircases feature in the main examples of all three practitioners' work analysed here. They provide a dynamic vehicle for the juxtaposition of angles, lines and three-dimensional forms, including the human actors. In addition, their semi-transparency increases the dramatic possibilities.

Losey returned to New York inspired by the theatrical practices, theories and concepts he had encountered in the Soviet Union. He spent most of 1936 working on the "Living Newspaper" unit, directing *Triple A Plowed Under*, which addressed recent farming troubles, and *Injunction Granted*,



Armand humiliates Marguerite on the staircase: from Meyerhold's 1935 production of Alexandre Dumas-fils' *The Lady of the Camellias*.

about trades union recognition. From 1935 to 1936, Living Newspapers were created in a national scheme under the Federal Theater Project, a huge, government-funded employment scheme for theatre workers, part of Roosevelt's Work Projects Administration. The United States Living Newspapers were created by unemployed theatre personnel and out-of-work journalists, who based the dramatised productions on current events and topical issues. Losey took advantage of the abundant resources of the project to put his new-found ideas into action. In *Injunction Granted* particularly, Losey adopted design principles influenced by Meyerhold and Okhlopkov. He built within the proscenium a single-unit set with ramps leading to five or six levels. Arnold Goldman describes how the "system of runways, platforms and hatches provided the planes and areas which could be selected by complicated lights and which could overflow into the audience". Goldman also attributes to Losey a "unity of design" that affected every element of conception and production," writing that this was lost to the Living Newspaper Unit when *Injunction Granted* ran into problems over its political stance and Losey resigned.



The multi-level set of *Injunction Granted*, with Norman Lloyd at the centre playing the clown/Justice Brandels.

That unity was to become a central characteristic of Losey's filmmaking, and it was fully formed by the time he made *The Criminal*. In order to help him achieve this, he employed John Hubley in Hollywood and later Richard Macdonald in Britain and Europe to work with him on what became known as the "pre-design process". He said he needed someone "who had a visual and dramatic sense, but who was also a painter". They would produce sketches to suggest sets and visual features. These were not blueprints or storyboards, but would enable Losey to visualise camera set-ups and movements. They would also guide the actors, the camera operators, costumier and other crew members. This process also gave the film a visual context, often based on one particular artist or set of visual references; in the case of *The Criminal*, for example, Victorian photographs of prisons and their occupants. Macdonald, who worked on sixteen Losey films, regarded the function of "a cohesive all-over image and visual style" as being peculiar to Losey, one not used or apparently even understood by other British directors or art directors.⁷ The films, certainly up until *Modesty Blaise* in 1966, differed from Losey's stage productions in that they employed ostensibly realistic built sets or locations. However, the "realism" would often be subject to aberrations of scale, or might be distorted through the use of unusual camera angles. Through shot selection and editing, Losey would strive to emphasise geometric elements on screen; for example, in the denouement of *The Prowler* (1951), cop-turned-bad Webb Garwood (Van Heflin) is on the run in a Mojave desert ghost town. As police close in, he makes a futile escape bid by trying to scale a mining spoil heap. In profile view, he scrambles and slides on the loose scree—a visual metaphor for the film's *noir* narrative of a flawed man on a hopeless quest. The heap bisects the screen diagonally, with Heflin's pumping legs and flailing arms outlined against the neutral grey of the sky. Another example occurs three-and-a-half minutes into *The Damned* (1963), Losey's science-fiction production for Hammer. King (Oliver Reed) and his motorcycle gang are gathered around the paved and walled plinth of a statue of George III, where they are planning to ambush and violently rob Simon Wells (Macdonald Carey). The teenaged thugs set off on their task in a mock military formation, marching to King's orders. This is captured in a direct overhead shot—apparently from the late monarch's point of view—which places the leather-clad, fore-shortened figures on a grid pattern formed by the paving slabs and low walls. This creates a disorienting effect before the camera pans and tilts up into a more conventional high-angled long shot. The overhead shot also provides dramatic irony, as the gang later becomes drawn into Wells's conflict with covert government forces. Losey habitually drew abstraction and symbolic meanings from the figurative; it seems that he was developing a cinematic language with which he could replicate certain effects of the Soviet theatre on screen. Furthermore, he was doing this in a way that replaced the non-illusory set design of his stage productions with a more ostensibly "realistic" approach.

In arguing that Losey's use of screen space owes a debt to Meyerhold's staging concepts, it is worthwhile to look for corroboration in the work of Sergei Eisenstein. He also made a change from theatre to film—albeit twenty-three years before Losey's first screen feature—and his connection to Meyerhold was long-standing and well documented. Eisenstein's films differ greatly from Losey's; the latter described the former as "obviously a genius", but said that his was "not the kind of film

that I like or am interested in" (Ciment 1985:39). Both men, however, are comparable in their use of vertical space in film, and the contention in this article is that Meyerhold influenced them both in this regard.

Eisenstein was one of the original five students comprising Meyerhold's State Higher Theatre Workshops in Moscow in 1921. As a former engineering student, he was ideally placed to help put the principles of Constructivism into stage design. "In Eisenstein," writes Marie Seton, "Meyerhold saw a young disciple and poured out his knowledge of the theatre to him" (Seton 1978: 46). Eisenstein was in turn fascinated by the dramatist's system of "biomechanics", which was based on a belief that an actor could learn a system of stylised gestures and postures, then mechanically reproduce them on stage in order to evoke specific emotions and psychological states in an audience. This accorded with Eisenstein's view that art could be subject to scientific principles. He wrote in 1933:

I, armed with my technical engineering methods, greedily tried to penetrate ever deeper into the origins of creativity and art, where I instinctively foresaw the same sphere of precise knowledge that my short experience in the field of engineering had inculcated in me.⁶

This faith in the connection between engineering and industry on the one hand, and art and creativity on the other, drew the two together. Eisenstein praised *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, with its constructivist set design and its scrupulously drilled movements by the cast. However, he felt that theatre was an unsatisfactory medium of expression, and was soon predicting its demise. The "final" play, he declared, was his own 1924 production, *Gas Masks*—"the last possible attempt within the confines of theatre to overcome its sense of illusion" (Eisenstein 1988: 82-83). Even Meyerhold's productions had failed to strip away enough bourgeois artifice to satisfy Eisenstein, so he set *Gas Masks* in the working environment of the Moscow Gas Factory. Seton comments: "The men of the new world [...] must create works so violent, so permeated with reality, that the spectator, seeing their works, would tire of Art and prefer the drama of reality itself" (1978: 65-6). The experiment failed, according to Seton, because Eisenstein realised that the real factory, and the audience of real workers, made the actors in their costumes and make-up look artificial and ridiculous. The play was "almost cinema", but theatre had failed Eisenstein; *Gas Masks* was but a logical step towards his making his first feature film, *Strike*, the following year (1988: 82-83).

In comparing still images from *Gas Masks* to the factory interior sequences in *Strike*, the visual similarities are arresting. Eisenstein might have theoretically turned 180 degrees from abstraction to the authenticity of industrial locations, but the way he uses the space, with actors moving in three dimensions within the intersecting diagonals of the industrial structure, carries strong echoes of Meyerhold's constructivist stage designs.

Throughout the opening scenes of *Strike*, workers are filmed moving freely and comfortably among the gantries, catwalks and stairways of a large industrial complex. Their lithe mastery of the environment contrasts with the sedentary, bloated aspect of the bosses, enclosed in their offices, dining rooms and narrow corridors. The managers and factory owners are squeezed into chairs, or pace up and down like caged animals, framed by the internal architecture. The workers, on the other hand, are



Stills from *Gas Masks* (top) and *Strike* (above) demonstrate Eisenstein's use of vertical space in theatrical and cinematic settings.

outside, either in the open woods and fields surrounding the factory, or interacting with the huge structures of the factory itself. As the "boys" of the shopfloor plan industrial action while sitting on the roofs and towers of the plant, treacherous collaborators spy on them from the ground. The employer-employee power dynamic is reversed in the topography of the film; Eisenstein's Marxist message is carried through the imagery of the workers commanding the upper levels of the buildings.

At 1hr 28min begins a climactic episode which is this film's equivalent of the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The bosses' mounted militia are enthusiastic in attempting to crush the strike, and they invade the vertical

space in an attempt to wrest control back from the strikers. On the intertitle "They have broken in", the charging men on horseback chase the workers back into their tenement block. The initial shot, filmed from around first-storey height, dissolves into a square-on long shot of the tenement building. Five storeys high, it comprises apartments arranged in a "U" shape. Spindly metal ladders and bridges provide access to galleries on each floor, the whole enclosed in iron railings. Washing hangs on a line between the two sides. Panicked men and women are running and climbing in different directions.



The workers' tenement block.

Militiamen on horseback cross first- and second-storey walkways. After two seconds, there is a cut to a medium-long shot from inside the building. Framed at the top by one of the iron bridges, with the chimneys and rooftops of the factory complex in the background, the silhouette of a soldier on horseback crosses from right to left. The effect is a sinister one, confirming as it does that the forces of evil in the film have permeated the vertical domain of the workers. After a brief cut back to the long shot of the structure and its panic-ridden inhabitants, the next shot looks diagonally down into the well of the building. Railings and walkways criss-cross the frame, with militiamen on horseback reaching down to whip and beat any of the fleeing workers within reach. The next cut is to a closer shot of a bridge seen earlier, but now the angle is higher and more acute. This has the effect of increasing the tension as the upper bridgework metaphorically encloses the terrified workers running right-to-left from a rider with a whip. Beyond, at ground level, a group of workers is being flogged by two more soldiers; they are helplessly boxed in both by the horses and by the claustrophobic geometry of the lines in Eisenstein's shot. More chaos is evident in the next cut, to a low-angle shot looking up from the ground. The galleries are filled with more scenes of brutality, as semi-shadowy figures of workers in the foreground attempt to climb off the structure to safety. One is seen falling to his death from a third-storey bridge.



Strike: The fall from the bridge.

His plummeting body is silhouetted against the sky before a cut to a medium shot of him hitting the ground. Two groups of women run past in panic, oblivious to his writhing form. The next shot at first seems incongruous; a young boy and his toddler sister in high angle medium shot play with dolls and kittens on one of the upper walkways. The camera tilts down and reveals a militiaman flogging workers below as the children play on happily.



Strike: The oblivious children.

The fallen man lies motionless in the next shot as the fleeing women are pursued by the militia. The cruelty is intensified as they gain control of the space, culminating with a horseman picking up the toddler and tossing her over the parapet to her death.

Throughout this sequence, Eisenstein has used the physical

structure of the tenement building in parallel with his montage techniques to enhance dramatic effect. As he alters angles, stretching and emphasising diagonal planes, the tension builds, with vertical and horizontal lines cutting across the escape routes of the workers to increase the sense that they are being hunted down in a three-dimensional maze. This use of space also carries a narrative force as vertical space ceases to represent freedom and potential, becoming instead a dead end where the ruling elite can brutally reassert its will.

Eisenstein, with his roots in the constructivist set designs he helped to create for Meyerhold, exhibits this sophisticated use of space and structure throughout *Strike*. By the time Joseph Losey directed his third feature, a 1951 Hollywood remake of Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), he was exhibiting comparable tendencies in his own screen work. Losey closely follows the narrative structure of the German film, but the production design differs from Lang's in the striking uses of vertical space in two sequences: the capture of the child-killer Harrow, played by David Wayne, hiding in an urban office block, and his subsequent mock trial in an underground car park. The first of these was shot in the Bradbury Building, built in 1893 in downtown Los Angeles.⁹ Losey said: "I got very excited by the Los Angeles locations which are one of the best aspects of the picture" (Ciment 1985: 106). The Bradbury features offices arranged on galleries open to a cavernous atrium under a glass dome. This was an ideal environment in which Losey could experiment with using vertical space for the dramatic effects he had learned on stage.

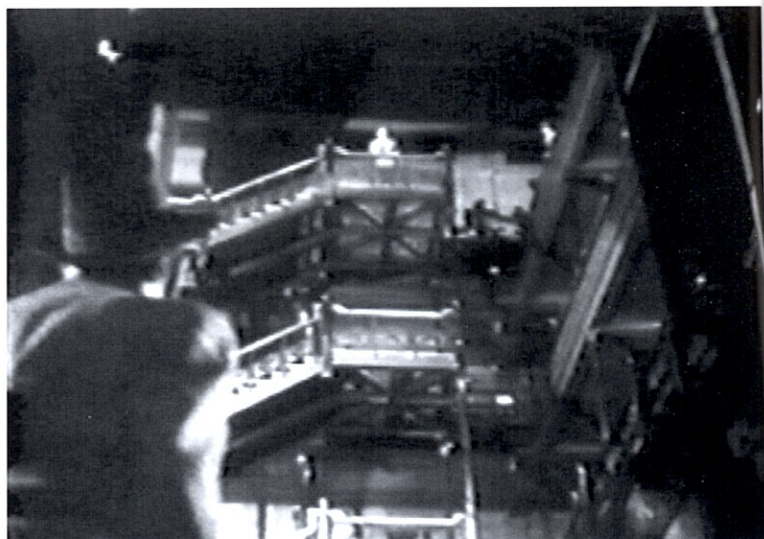
Photo by Luke Jones, Wikimedia Commons, some rights reserved



The Bradbury Building atrium in 2008.

He makes full use of the atrium, its vertiginous walkways and galleries, the intricate diagonals of its stairways and the gloomy claustrophobia of its passages. At 1hr 1min, Harrow, hiding out in the upper levels of the building, has been locked into the store of the "Venus Plastic Mannequin Co.," a space bizarrely filled with plastic replica body parts. He is with a young girl he has abducted (Janine Perreau)¹⁰, and is hammering on a nail, hoping to use it to pick the lock. Downstairs, the mob boss Charlie Marshall (Martin Gabel) has broken into the building to hunt down the killer with a large posse of crooks. One of them, MacMahan (Walter Burke), is upstairs and hears the hammering. As he starts to run to report his discovery, he is in medium-long shot from a camera on a staircase slightly below the gallery level, shooting through the ornate wrought-iron-and-wood

barriers enclosing the Bradbury's stairways and galleries. The camera pans to follow the man from left to right along the gallery and tilts downwards to follow him down the stairs. As he passes, the next floor down is briefly seen before a cut to a square-on long shot of the whole staircase, which serves the top four of the building's five storeys. The shot reveals the source of an echoey hubbub of male voices heard throughout the scene; men can be seen moving at every level as MacMahan hurtles down the stairs. The frame is a criss-cross of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, well-ordered and regular where they are formed from the building's structure, but rendered confusing and ambiguous by the intense shadows thrown by the hard lighting. The conflicting geometries of architecture and lighting symbolically enhance the sense of order turned to chaos. MacMahan reaches Marshall and his two lieutenants, proclaiming: "I found him!" The shot, like the opening one in this sequence, is from outside the safety barrier, and, at MacMahan's news, the men turn to walk from left to right, followed by the panning camera. Unlike in the first shot, however, they do not reach a staircase, but step into an ornate lift. The shot continues with the three men in the lift moving upwards, shot from the front with the camera moving on a parallel lift. Safety barriers and other architectural paraphernalia cross the frame from top to bottom. The men all look upwards towards the mannequin storeroom as they rise. Their stillness creates a brief hiatus of calm, emphasising Marshall's power and control over his men and the situation. As the lift reaches the top floor and stops, the moving camera halts momentarily before panning right to left to follow the men as they burst from the lift. They run back towards the staircase, where other men are converging, with the low-angled, harsh lighting casting large shadows on the walls. The first close-up in this sequence follows the next cut, a high-angle shot of Harrow



M: "The watchman got loose!"

matching action shot of Marshall trying the handle from the outside signals the end of Harrow's flight. After he is taken by the crooks, a security guard sets off the building's alarm bell and there is one more long shot of the staircase, this time from the mezzanine level tilted upwards and at a slightly canted angle. The image is framed vertically by a doorway, and the vertical lines are converging, where previously they had been parallel. The change of angle reflects the increasingly hysterical pitch of the sequence. Dwarfed by the structure, a crook on the top level shouts down to ask about the ringing. One of his colleagues appears at floor level, filling the left-hand third of the frame. The two figures alternately make the structure appear huge, then miniature. The effect, combined with the changed angles of the lines, is disconcerting, preparing viewers for the confusion to follow as the gang members drag their screaming quarry away before the police arrive.

Losey generates dynamism within the frame by moving his actors along intersecting vertical, horizontal and diagonal planes within a deep field. As in the Eisenstein sequence, the director intensifies the sense of frantic activity by moving groups of actors in different directions along the various planes of the set. The physicality of the ensemble movement generates an emotional response in the viewer, a process redolent of Meyerhold's biomechanics concepts. Losey also uses the Bradbury location's vertical aspects as visual metaphor in the film; Harrow has tried to escape by fleeing upwards, but the forces of the underworld reach up and ensnare him, with Marshall's swift, mechanically-aided ascent underlining his irresistible power. The criminals frog-march Harrow to the roof—as in *Strike*, the notion of height as sanctuary is crushed—before dragging him back to their subterranean world to deliver retribution. That underworld is represented by a basement car park, where the killer is subjected to a mock trial in front of the gang members and the massed ranks of street people involved in his capture. Losey harks back to the Okhlopkov-inspired stage runways he used in the Living Newspaper production *Injunction Granted* in the way he moves the actors on the wide concrete access ramp. The blind balloon seller (John Miljan), tapping his white stick, walks slowly down this ramp, helped by one of the criminals. The top of the ramp is illuminated, rendering the two men in silhouette casting long shadows. The killer looks on with



M: The gangsters converge on Harrow's hiding place.

lying on the floor trying to unlock the door with bloodied hands. As he feverishly works, the door handle slowly begins to move and, terrified, he backs away out of shot. A cut to the

an expression of foreboding as his nemesis descends to deliver his damning testimony, that he sold Harrow a balloon with which he trapped his child victim Elsie Coster (Robin Fletcher).

Certainly, Lang also made cinematic use of verticals in the original version of *M*, notably in an early shot where Frau Beckmann (Ellen Widmann) looks down into the abyss of her tenement building stairwell and calls out for her daughter Elsie (Inge Landgut) who is late home from school.¹¹ He also used a staircase in the office building where the killer Hans Beckert (Peter Lorre) is captured. As in the Losey version, the criminal who hears Beckert hammering behind a door runs downstairs to tell his boss. However, the staircase is enclosed and the sequence comprises a series of repetitive cuts showing the man running down individual flights, attracting the attention of colleagues as he progresses. The diagonals of the banisters and the low-key lighting provide drama in the sequence, but in the Losey film the open staircase and atrium design of the Bradbury Building gave the director the opportunity to convey the information in a more spatially complex manner, using more actors. It should be noted that this sequence represents a switch in style within the film; up until that point, Losey favours the point of view of an observer in a taxicab, according to Edward Dimendberg. He has compared camera angles in the two films, and finds a theme of outside surveillance in Lang's film, where the

predilection for high angle overhead shots [...] suggests a common mode of controlled vision that eludes the control of both the law and the criminals. [...] Spatial surveillance in Losey's film substitutes the roving, horizontal view from the automobile and the road for the fixed and vertically elevated perspective in the centripetal metropolis.¹²

This analysis overlooks Losey's creation of the sequence described above. This stands out from the rest of the film through the use of significant visual similarities to the tenement slaughter episode in *Strike*; both sequences hark back to the multi-planed constructivist concepts of Meyerhold, and they prefigure the techniques which generate such intensity in the prison sections of *The Criminal*. So Losey followed Lang's original version of *M* closely, but made his biggest departure from it

when he decided to rely on his own experience in theatre. The result would be the most visually arresting section of the film.

By the time he made *The Criminal*, Losey had consolidated his command of vertical space as a device to express power relationships—in the case described, between Kelly, Bannion, Barrows and the governor. He had honed this technique to the extent that he could build interweaving layers of psychological and narrative meaning through character and camera movements within that space. If the metaphysical choreography of *The Criminal* was more sophisticated than that of *M*, it would reach a peak in *The Servant* (1963), Losey's first collaboration with Pinter. The staircase and landings in the upper-crust London home of aristocratic drone Tony (James Fox) become a kind of three-dimensional snakes-and-ladders board for power plays, mind-games and survival struggles with his valet Barrett (Dirk Bogarde).

A highly charged use of vertical space is just one of several strategies Losey adopted and adapted from the theatre. Others included using the physicality of actors—individually and in groups—in ways recalling Meyerhold's theories of biomechanics. Another strategy was based on Brecht's adoption of Russian-inspired alienation effects (effects described by Losey as "much misunderstood"). He also learned from Brecht a painstaking approach to detail in design and in the gestures and movement of his actors, plus a "heightening of reality."¹³ Other filmmakers have followed at least some of these approaches, but there is a uniqueness in the unity of Losey's method, and in the consistency with which he adopted stage techniques and adapted them into his own singular, compelling film language.

NOTES

- 1 Ciment, Michel. 1985. *Conversations with Losey*. London and New York: Methuen. 36.
- 2 *The Lady of the Camellias* was to be one of the Soviet director's final works; within three years, the Stalinist authorities who had been increasingly suspicious of "formalism" in Meyerhold's work expelled him from his theatre. In 1939 he was arrested and tortured before being shot in 1940. Mention of his name was suppressed until two years after Stalin's death in 1953 (Braun, Edward. 1995. *Meyerhold: A revolution in theatre*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen. 290-307).
- 3 Hughes, Robert. 1991. *The shock of the new: Art and the century of change*. 2nd ed. London: Thames and Hudson. 89.
- 4 Hoover, Marjorie L. 1988. *Meyerhold and his set designers*. New York: Peter Lang. 125.
- 5 The idea of breaking down the proscenium arch in this way was actually Meyerhold's, according to Braun (309), although it has also been credited to Eisenstein (Seton, Marie. 1978. *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A biography*. Revised. London: Dobson. 58), among many others. Whoever came up with the idea first, the Russian theatre historian and critic Konstantin Rudnitsky says that Okhlopkov, "more boldly and more vigorously than other directors, tried to destroy the boundary between stage and auditorium" (Rudnitsky, Konstantin, ed. 1988. *Russian and Soviet theatre: Tradition and the avant-garde*. Trans. Roxane Permar. London: Thames and Hudson. 282-3).
- 6 Leach, Robert. 2003. *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold*. Stage and screen studies; v.3. Oxford: Peter Lang. 168.
- 7 Cauter, David. 1994. *Joseph Losey: A revenge on life*. London: Faber and Faber. 324.
- 8 Eisenstein, Sergei. 1988. *S. M. Eisenstein, selected works: Volume I, writings, 1922-34*. Trans. Richard Taylor, ed. Richard Taylor. London: BFI. 243.
- 9 The Bradbury Building was, and continues to be, a popular location venue for filmmakers. It was used, for example, in *The Artist* (2011), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Chinatown* (1974) and *Marlowe* (1969).
- 10 This is a departure from the Lang version, where the killer is hiding alone.
- 11 Examples of similar shots abound; Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) offers one of the more celebrated.
- 12 Dimendberg, E. 1997. From Berlin to Bunker-Hill: Urban space, late modernity, and film-noir in Fritz Lang's and Joseph Losey's *M*. *Wide Angle-A Quarterly Journal of Film History Theory Criticism & Practice* 19 (4) (OCT). 72, 83.
- 13 Losey, Joseph. 1961. The individual eye. *Encore* March-April. 14.



The Servant: Susan (Wendy Craig) in conflict with her fiancé's butler Barrett (Dirk Bogarde).

DOUBTING THOMAS

MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI'S *BLOW-UP*



By GEORGE PORCARI

"What I am is a photographer", he explains. "To have a job like mine means that I don't belong to the great community of the mugs: the vast majority of squares who are exploited."

Absolute Beginners—Colin MacInness

In the 50's we became aware of the possibility of seeing the whole world at once, through the great visual matrix that surrounds us; a synthetic, 'instant' view. Cinema, television, magazines, newspapers immersed the artist in a total environment and this new visual ambience was photographic.

Collected Words—Richard Hamilton

1. *Getting to 1966*

In 1959 the brilliant and enigmatic writer Julio Cortazar wrote a short story called *The Devil's Drool* that would be adapted by Michelangelo Antonioni, Tonino Guerra and Edward Bond in 1966 into *Blow-Up*. Cortazar, raised in Argentina, had been in exile in Paris since 1951 when he was 37 due to his leftist politics. He along with other Latin American authors in this highly fertile period ushered in a new sort of novel that would no longer be tied to the slow, rural realism that had become a trademark style of Latin American writers. With a daring borrowed from Faulkner, Celine, Woolf and Joyce, they would tackle contemporary life in a manner that was consciously urban and modern. The resulting stories and novels were paradoxical and matter-of-fact, darkly serious and comical.

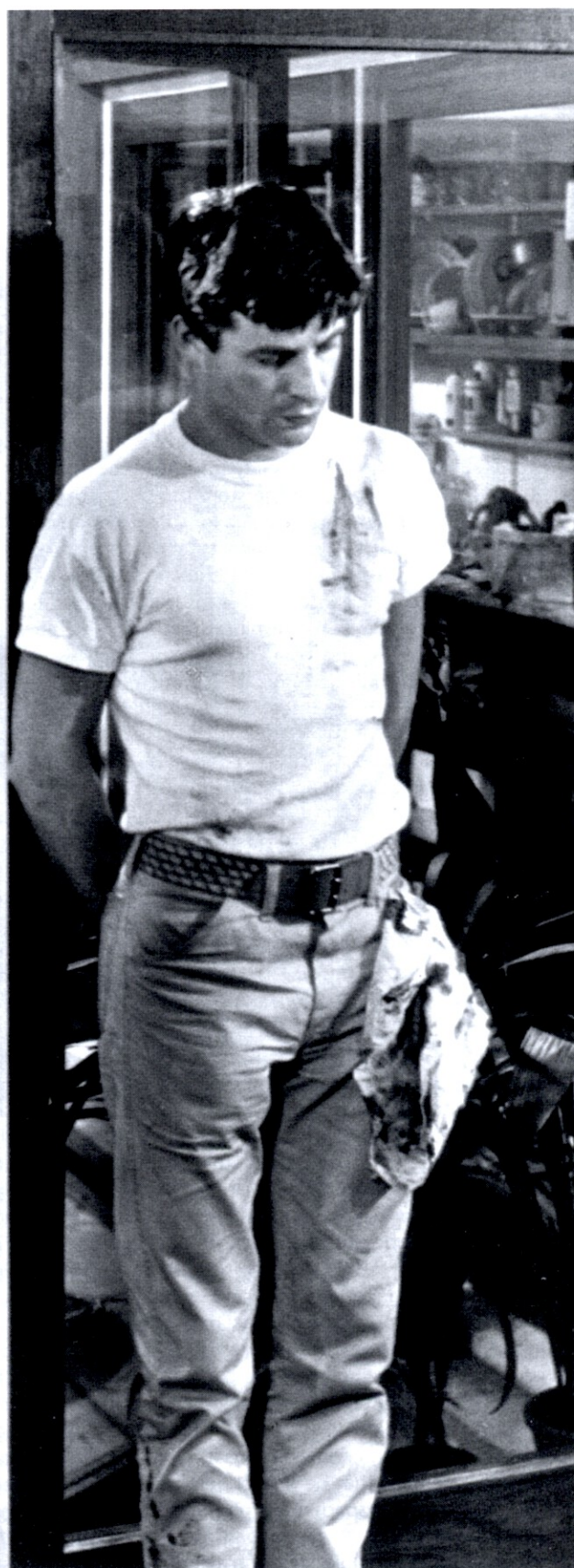
The novels of the "Boom"—as it came to be called best captured the fragmented nature, incipient violence and absurdity of the period as well as the sense that there was a new highly urban social matrix that was much more intense, flexible and ambiguous than any that had been experienced before. The everyday world was a palimpsest where we caught glimpses of other realities—usually haunted by history of some kind—underneath the familiar everyday world that we could never understand completely but only catch in subjective episodes. In short the glimpse replaced the look in the new work and it was Cortazar who was the most adventurous in his choices.

The Devil's Drool is a sixteen page story in which a photographer named Michel living in contemporary Paris narrates an event in the first person using a laconic and self deprecating prose style. This is how the story begins: "I'll never know how I'm supposed to tell this, in the first second or third person plural or inventing continuously new forms that wouldn't be of any use anyway."¹ He seems strangely removed from events even as he experiences them—he wanders around Paris seemingly without aim. The casual tone becomes sinister in a very subtle way for we intuit that the instability in the narrator's choice of point-of-view is the subject of the story itself: "I had no desire to take pictures and lit a cigarette just for something to do"² He immediately contradicts himself and takes some pictures of a couple kidnapping a boy—he's not sure—using a very small Contax camera, that was then euphemistically referred to as a spy or detective camera. On returning to his studio he blows up the images he's taken and what he saw—or what his camera captured—emerges and he ruminates on the horror. Or is that what happened? Here he describes the situation he thinks he saw on crossing one of the islands of the Seine: "Curious that the scene (nothing really, the two there, young in different ways) would have a disquieting aura. I thought that I was making that happen, and that my photograph, if I blew it up, would reconstitute things to their real nature. I would like to have known what the man in the grey hat was thinking, sitting in the front of the car waiting by the dock reading a paper or sleeping. I had just discovered that because people sitting in cars always disappear, they get lost in that miserable private cell that gives them movement and danger. Yet the car had been there all the time forming part (or deforming part) of the island. A car, how to describe it? A beam of light, a bank in a plaza. Never the same light, the sun, always being new on the skin and in the eyes, and the boy and the woman alone as one, put there to alter the island in some way, to show it to me in some new light"³ The narrator is clearly unreliable. Antonioni, who already had experience translating the prose style of moody novelists, such as the troubled Cesare Pavese in *The Girlfriends* (1955), took on Cortazar's story for his second English language film. The first was one of the three short films that make up *The Vanquished* (1953). In this short episode, that could be a first draft of *Blow-Up*, a young man and would be poet kills a woman seemingly for no reason in a London park. He then tries to financially profit from the murder by selling his story to a newspaper by pretending to be the person who discovered the body. Liking the attention he's receiving he cavalierly confesses to the crime that he claims was perfect because it had no logical motive. His story becomes a sensation and he in fact does receive the attention that he desperately wants. The film ends with a perplexed newspaperman phoning in his story from a phone booth while the camera pans away from him to the same park where a couple is now playing a game of tennis—

oblivious to the strange drama that's unfolding a few meters away from them. In this final incongruous shot Antonioni lays the groundwork for his subsequent work of the 1960's.

In *Blow-Up* we follow a highly successful fashion photographer in the midst of London in 1966. He is now named Thomas—as in doubting Thomas—named after the apostle who refused to believe that Christ had arisen from the grave after his death unless he could see and touch the wounds himself. Thomas wanders from an antique store that he plans on buying as a real estate investment into Maryon Park located in a then gritty low-income area of South East London. There he takes some shots clandestinely of two lovers at play—a young woman played by Vanessa Redgrave and an older man whom we never meet. The woman sees him and asks Thomas for the film. He refuses and later in his studio after blowing up the negatives sees that in fact he may have recorded a murder in progress. There is a hand holding a gun off to the side behind some bushes. The woman seems to know what's going on—the man is oblivious. An idyllic encounter that was supposed to finish Thomas' work in progress, a photography book about the poor in London, seems to have recorded a man's murder. But of course there are doubts. Thomas returns to the park and finds the body, but it has vanished when he returns with his camera to take a picture of it. In the midst of this the woman from the park turns up at his studio and continues to demand the original negatives to the pictures; this is interrupted by some flirting and the arrival of a propeller from the antique store that Thomas had purchased on a whim. The woman leaves with what she thinks are the negatives (that he has switched) and Thomas is left completely in the dark. He decides to investigate what really happened via the images he took in the park, find the woman and solve the mystery—in short he becomes a detective. Siegfried Kracauer described the detective as an essentially modern figure who is on a rational quest for meaning and narrative closure.⁴ It is the detective who uses logic, keen observation and deductive skills to assemble fragmentary details into a meaningful narrative and thereby arrive at the truth - but does he? *Blow-Up* is a meditation on this question. The sense of dislocation and anxiety in the film are acute but never fully articulated as they would be in a conventional narrative film. For example when the woman in Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* is suffering from dislocation we understand that it is her perceptions which are distorted because she is deranged, not the world, we are merely seeing it through her eyes. Conversely in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* it is society itself which is deranged having become dislocated from a collective sense of common human values that bind us and it is the adaptation to that society that is seen as morally reprehensible and comically grotesque. In *Blow-Up* it is not possible to pinpoint either a trauma in the characters or a social dystopia at work. Antonioni gives us good helpings of the disjunctions and psychological dislocations that we have come to expect from "art" films, but then keeps them in play without resolving them with brilliantly suggestive shots that appear headed toward metaphor or toward a conclusion and then the symbolic evaporates, the possible philosophic explanation becomes muddled with contradictions, the psychological becomes opaque.

The role of Thomas, brilliantly played in the film by David Hemmings, has been touted as being modeled on the photographer David Bailey. As recently as 2007 Kieron Tyler writes: "*Blow-Up* also subverts London on its journey towards the



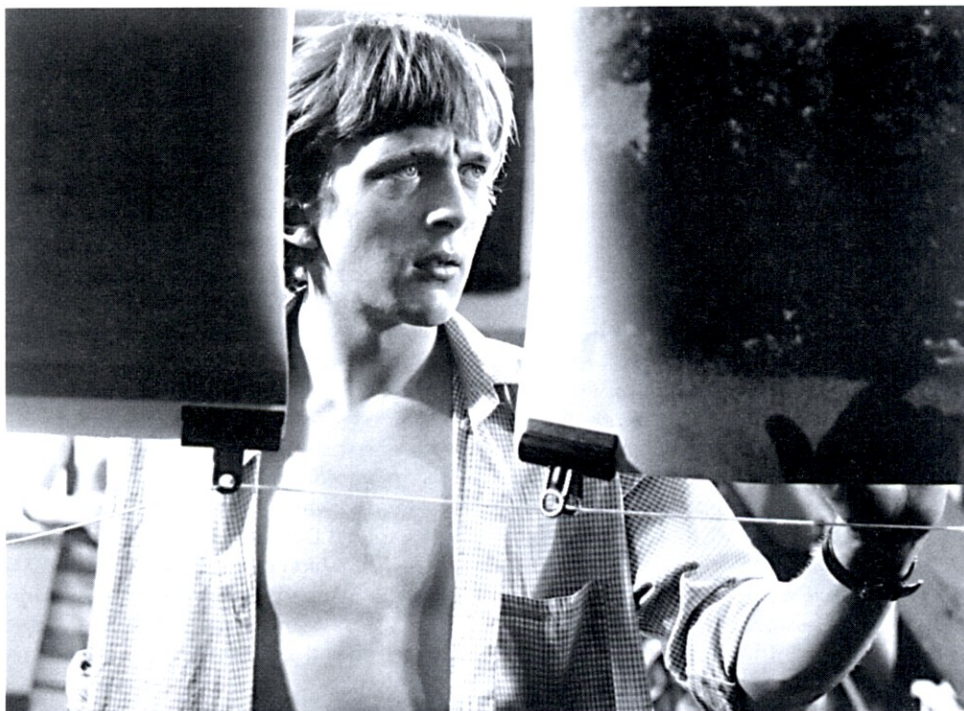
"Summer of Love". Hemmings—modeled on David Bailey—photographs some top models including Verushka and Peggy Moffitt.⁵ In fact there were several models aside from David Bailey that were used for the role of Thomas. Alongside Bailey, who was then—and remains today—the best known of the younger photographers of that generation, Brian Duffy and Terence Donovan formed the "terrible trinity"—a term coined by the press of the time. The young photographers were also called "East Enders"—a term that not only described a district in London but signified the working class. While previous generations of British photographers—most famously Cecil Beaton—came from the upper classes and were featured regularly in traditional journals such as *Picture Post* and *Life* the "terrible trinity" wore their working class origins on their sleeve. A brief window of opportunity had opened in the rigid class system in England that was also happening in art, film, literature, theater and music. These young photographers took on portraiture, journalism and fashion and because of their youth and quick rise to prominence came to be known as the *Young Meteors*.⁶ They shared a similar aesthetic concern with everyday life that was depicted in a way that seemed unaffected by formal or flâneur strategies that, while not completely absent, remained in the background leaving center stage to a content that was often harshly realistic and without a clear narrative arc that explained the action. Their photographs were as direct as a snapshot—an aesthetic that was wholeheartedly embraced. Other photographers at the time were of course working along similar lines such as Helen Levitt in the United States, Agustín Jiménez in Mexico and Mario Giacomelli in Italy among others. There was also the influence of American post-war action painting with their emphasis on improvisation, emotional integrity, directness and speed—as well as William Klein's influential and groundbreaking book *Life is Good & Good for You in New York* published in Paris in 1956 and Robert Frank's *The Americans* two years later. In contrast to the stuffy pictures from the postwar era the work of the *Young Meteors* was spontaneous, fresh, sexy, darkly humorous, as influenced by modern graphic design as by television and cinema. An important element that made the work of the *Young Meteors* particularly British was the influence of the *Angry Young Men* in the theater with plays such as *The Entertainer* by John Osborne that depicted everyday situations and speech unfiltered by the polite theatrical conventions of the time that had lost touch with people's ordinary lives. The *Kitchen Sink Realism* of films such as *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* set new standards for capturing interior monologues and personal sensibilities and contrasting them with harsh social realities delivered with a freshness usually found only in documentaries. This documentary approach is beautifully expressed in the *New Cinema* movement that included Ken Loach, and that captured the complex social fabric with very limited means and a high degree of realism—going even beyond the work of Italian Neorealism that still seemed tied to certain conventions of melodrama in their narratives and musical cues. Lastly, the work of the *Young Meteors* was also bringing something new: aware of avant-garde cinema and the collages of the British *Independent Group*—the first group of artists to consciously create Pop art as early as 1949—the younger photographers were not confined to outmoded conventions and restrictions and were free to experiment and explore more

demanding and enigmatic kinds of images. The new work was conscious of complex and often contradictory emotions and allusive sensibilities that were articulated indirectly or obliquely.

Despite the large number of models available for the character of Thomas perhaps the principal influence on the film was John Cowan who was a gifted photographer of movement. Older than the *Young Meteors* he concentrated on fashion shooting in natural light and using actual locations albeit with a high degree of theatrical artifice. It is his photographs that we see in the film as belonging to Thomas and it is also his studio: 39 Princess Place in Notting Hill. The place had been a carriage works in the early 20th century and then a furniture store. In a feature on Cowan in 1965 the *Daily Mail* called it the most amazing studio in London.⁷ John Cowan rented out the immense studio to Antonioni for the filming from May to July in 1966. Cowan also lent technical advice on the process of shooting and developing film and provided authentic details. He was one of the first people in London to have a two way car radio, with a call sign "Copper 8"—a feature adopted by Antonioni as well as Cowan's penchant for wearing white trousers, for drinking and playing music during shoots, and for a "recklessness that by the end of the decade had forced him to leave London"⁸ The Cowan prints that one sees in Thomas' studio are from the *Interpretation of Impact Through Energy* exhibition held in 1964.

David Bailey's justly famous *Box of Pin-Ups*, a collection of portraits from 1965 brilliantly articulated the crisp high contrast style that was studied and laconic, sexually frank and sarcastic, qualities that captured the moment very well. The high contrast black and white images were shaped by the work of the Italian Mario Giacomelli, influenced by printmaking, and the British photographer Bill Brandt who had been influenced by high contrast cinematography—principally Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Francis Wyndham was a writer who did the text for Bailey's book and was subsequently hired by Antonioni to teach him the habits of the locals and to show him the places where photographers lived—how they conducted their private and public lives.⁹ They noted prosaic elements, for example that both the photographers Claude Virgin and David Bailey owned propellers that they used as decoration in their studios and that Bailey owned a Rolls Royce and an antique shop named *Carrot on Wheels*. Antonioni and his writers met the models Jill Kennington and Verushka in the studio owned by David Montgomery—a fashion photographer that worked regularly for *Vogue*—where they also noted the use of large glass panels used successfully by Richard Avedon in his influential fashion work and incorporated them into the film.¹⁰ It is David Montgomery who is seen in the opening credits photographing the model Donyale Luna—the first black model to feature regularly in fashion magazines—in Brixton Market.¹¹

Blow-Up's superb art direction was managed by Assheton Gorton whose team added mezzanine walkways and contrasting modern and antique furnishings to Cowan's loft. Classic and contemporary art are hung alongside Cowan's black and white prints creating a subtle tension between warring aesthetic styles. A large glass coffee table conspicuously seems to float over a metallic sculpture made from bottle racks and on its polished surface sits a large magnifying glass—the essential prop in the murder mystery.¹² Montgomery's assistant Reg Wilkins was



cast as Thomas' assistant keeping his real name and lackadaisical style in the presence of models casually walking around semi-naked waiting for the moment when they might take part in the city's fashionable milieu where features such as *Young London*, May 1966 "confirmed a new power base".¹³ Assheton Gorton also chose Maryon park as it called to mind the theatrical spatial qualities of de Chirico—"an artist much admired by both Gorton and Antonioni."¹⁴ Moreover, David Mellor quotes Gorton: "it felt like spectral ground—like an ancient place and contained powerful energies."¹⁵

Thomas shoots fashion for a living but the body of work he seems to really hold dear is a series of photos about the poor in London. When we first see Thomas he is posing as a homeless man so he can infiltrate this world—before casually finding his Rolls Royce parked near a shelter for the homeless. In a fashionable restaurant Thomas shows a portfolio of photographs of the poor to his business colleague—a writer named Ron.

This work, actually shot by Don McCullin, most closely resembled the work of various *Young Meteors* working in photo-reportage for the Sunday supplements that were hugely influential in the postwar era throughout Europe and the United States. What made these photographs different from the usual images seen in photo journals was that the pictures were constructed and laid out as narratives from the start—they were photo-essays in the tradition of Walker Evans, Cartier-Bresson, Ramon Masats—and most importantly for British photographers—Bill Brandt whose photo-essays analyzing the English class system such as *The English at Home* (1936) set the stage for what was to come. They were intensely felt photographs that were seen by the general public on a weekly basis. McCullin, one of the most inspired of the *Young Meteors*, was hired by Antonioni to photograph the portfolio of documentary photographs on the unemployed and the murder in the park, both of which explicitly reference the photo-essay. It is his pictures that we see when Thomas begins to blow-up images and search for clues.¹⁶ McCullin's personal work was inspired by Robert Capa and while often brilliant was, like his mentor's, graphic, direct and violent. He would eventually give up his very successful career as a street photographer for work in Vietnam and subsequent wars, but in the mid sixties he was engaged in a profound examination of the grueling class wars in post-war Europe. The spectacular rise of McCullin and of the *Young Meteors* can be seen as part of a larger enterprise in which documentary realism—and the working class images associated with it—were beginning to permeate all areas of the arts. It was not just a matter of working class aesthetics but of ethics—hence the resistance from the status quo. Godard's *Breathless* and Tony Richardson's *Look Back in Anger* would be made in 1959—the same year that saw the publication of the Julio Cortazar story that would become *Blow-Up*. McCullin himself had mixed feelings about Antonioni's film: "He was at first uneasy about the use of these two very distinct bodies of photographs in the film, these two orders of photographic signs. He sensed that the view of life that interested Antonioni represented a transition from the moment of late fifties, early sixties social realism to a modernized Pop. 'Style' he explained, 'had become everything, now that we had left behind the social realism of the angry young man behind.'¹⁷ McCullin's doubts would in a sense be incorporated into the film itself as Antonioni carefully juxtaposed one kind of photography—social realism—with another—fashion—but to what end?

2. A Walk in the Park

By a wonderful paradox at the heart of the photographic enterprise the closer one gets to something in an image by blowing it up the more it evaporates into mere pointillist abstraction. When Thomas clips his photographs to a line in order to create a narrative—literally hanging by a thread—it is an attempt to understand what these photographs might be about—what is really in them. While they somewhat resemble a story-board as Thomas—and Antonioni's camera pan—read them left to right—they cannot be reduced to this convenient metaphor. Story-boards map out the way continuity will be used in the shooting and editing of a film bound by storytelling conventions that involve a coherent plot, explainable motivations and action that move the narrative toward a resolution. This is clearly not the case here. While Antonioni was known to go to great pains in pre-production *Blow-Up* uses all of the conventions common to the European feature film to undermine the rationalist foundations found in those very conventions—but why? According to Mary Watt *Blow-Up* is a "parody of the Neorealist tradition...a closer look at the character (of Thomas) suggests that Antonioni, in addition to using typology to explicate the allegorical significance of Thomas has also relied on it to create a parodic (sic) relationship between the modern photographer and the gospel figure which in turn, desacralizes the Neorealist project and its attempts at truth telling."¹⁸ Watt's astute analysis of the film's subtext as a parody of Neorealism—a movement to which Antonioni contributed from his very first short film in 1947 *People of the Po Valley*—allows us to see the character of Thomas in a new light—as a version of the director himself as a young man. Watt continues: "we can see that at his most essential Thomas is the 'twin' of Antonioni."¹⁹ Watt's analysis suggests that Antonioni is thinking about his Neorealist roots—as did Fellini when he made the short *Matrimonial Agency* (1953) in which a werewolf attempts to find a female companion using an agency—and the unlikely story is shot using all of the conventions of Neorealism thereby completely subverting the very form he is using through irony, parody and satire. But *Blow-Up* cannot be summarized as a parody because it turns the film—as happens with almost all parody—into a polemical work created to mock or to trivialize its subject. Watt again: "...Thomas' belief that he might know through his camera is mocked. In that moment so too is the viewer's faith in verisimilitude and indeed, in the recorded image, ridiculed"²⁰ While Watt's analysis links *Blow-Up* to *The Devil's Droll*, since Cortazar was also using the meandering enigmatic prose style of its narrator to undermine the very conventions that were being deployed, there is a problem. Antonioni's use of parody as a subtext cannot detract us from the director's more ambitious aims—that make *Blow-Up* a far more difficult film to pin down. What we have in Antonioni's film is a search for meaning that questions the validity of established forms and conventions in photography, painting and film to understand reality or meaning at all. Rationalism finds its limits, evidence becomes enigmatic, logical deduction finds only a mess of contradictions. But Antonioni doesn't leave it there—he uses Thomas—or as Watt calls him his "twin"—to explore the meaning behind his failure to find a complete, unconditional meaning or truth. Antonioni put it himself succinctly: "I am a person who has things he wants to show, rather than things to say. There are times the two concepts coincide, and then we arrive at a work of art."²¹

Watt also briefly mentions that *Blow-Up* was released in a

time of recent scrutiny of photographic evidence in the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination in Dallas on November²², 1963. Throughout the mid sixties this was the most scrutinized short film in history. It was also the first time that the population at large through television were allowed to so see—or perhaps more to the point forced to see repeatedly—a close second by second frame-by-frame analysis of a film. Only certain avant-garde works such as Chris Marker's *La Jette* had really bothered to explore individual frames to such a degree. While Hitchcock brilliantly anticipated this fascination with a pictorialized imagination and the solution to a crime in *Rear Window* he held onto conventional narrative structures that Antonioni rejected. In the Zapruder film as it was shown on television shortly after the murder, time was broken down from the film's 18 frames per second to 1 frame a second, while some particularly important frames—of the famous grassy knoll where a second gunman might or might not be hiding—were blown-up and explored in depth as photographic enlargements. The results were—as one would expect—inconclusive. The more Zapruder's film was blown-up the less it revealed and the more it suggested.

Another possibility might be that Thomas is creating a proto-cinematic collage that connects him to Eadweard Muybridge and other early photographers of movement. This is articulated by Warren Neidich: "*Blow-Up*...is part of a much larger impulse of 1960's avant-garde cinema to connect cinema to its proto-cinematic roots: the motion studies of Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, and the single long takes of the earlier Lumiere Brothers' films...The process of mechanical reproduction (both his use of the camera and the enlarger) and collage (his reassembly of the images on the studio wall) that define Thomas' investigation of the "real", are a regression of cinema to its ancestral derivations in photography of the late nineteenth century. The evolving scene of the murder is deconstructed into a set of motion studies. Film is montaged (sic) into the photo-still and through this process the true nature of reality unfolds."²² The experimental works by Muybridge and Marey were attempts to answer long held questions about movement that had preoccupied people for centuries. Some of the questions asked were as pedestrian as: Does a horse ever leave the ground on all four limbs while galloping? The answer turned out to be yes. Others were more abstract: Is there a limit to how time can be broken down into fractions or is there a point at which one can go no further and if so where is that point? They of course wanted to understand how things moved in duration but their scientific research was also a sensuous exploration through photography of time and its relationship to an event. Mr. Neidich would like to turn *Blow-Up* into an illustration of a calculated investigation—via post-structuralism—into "the real": "Only after a series of "blow-ups" ...do the secrets that lay hidden in the pictorial space fully emerge."²³ Do the secrets hidden in the pictorial space fully emerge? I would say the contrary that they multiply as he sips his wine while trying to make sense of it all. Thomas cannot get closer to the "truth" of the moment that he photographed either by coming in closer to parts of his negative by blowing the image up, or by examining the image with a magnifying glass, or by the selection of different images into a cogent narrative. *Blow-Up* beautifully leaves out any possible clearly defined resolution to the problem of narration that it has set up teasing possible solutions into and out of the narrative with incredible dexterity. The visual architecture of the film is beautifully balanced and its illusive complexities are handled with a bravura absent from Antonioni's earlier work. There is nothing in *Blow-Up* that is

explicit or exact—everything is casually oblique, in flux and unstable. While Antonioni's work anticipates the doubt and paradox that are crucial elements of post-structuralism *Blow-Up* and Antonioni's body of work as a whole is much closer to Albert Camus's melancholy skepticism grounded in a profound appreciation of sense experience.

It becomes clear from the juxtaposition of events in the narration that using photography as a means to uncover layers of reality and arrive at some fundamental truth is also in some sense connected to sexual desire. We see this same relationship later in *Identification of a Woman* in which a film director's search for themes in his film, locations and sexual companionship are so interrelated that we can say the boundaries between them are not simply unclear but that they have been obliterated on purpose. In *Blow-Up* it is no coincidence that Thomas' probing of his photographs is interrupted by an orgy with two aspiring models. It's as if the sexual act were a displacement of the need to know—or vice versa as the two at that point become fused in an orgasmic release—but a release that only leads to more desire and anxiety and a greater need to know.

The orgy takes place on an enormous strip of purple paper that has been unwound from its spool during foreplay. Significantly this kind of paper is called a seamless and its purpose is to eliminate the horizon line that separates the ground from the sky, or the floor from the wall, creating a seamless space for portraiture in which the sitter appears to be in an undefined space (rather than a place) without any clues regarding social context—in short messy "reality" is removed—the seamless is as clean as a dissecting table. Irving Penn and Richard Avedon are the acknowledged masters of this kind of photography in the US and the 'terrible trinity' all used the seamless throughout their careers for their bread and butter work. The seamless continues to be used today by a wide range of photographers in art and commerce—so ubiquitous that it is invisible. Its significance in the orgy is that the sexual act literally and figuratively rips this seamless to pieces—it is left a shambles with wet spots, creases and tears—not at all the sort of thing that could be used to create conventional portraits as reality has left its mark. Antonioni luxuriates on the purple surface that has left traces of humans and their movements. The sand in *Zabriskie Point* temporarily etched by the orgy of copulating couples serves a similar function of gravitas—a poetic memento of the function of lost time that Muybridge was so at pains to stop.

The brilliant use of color in *Blow-Up* is carefully measured even in presumably casual images that are on screen only a few seconds such as the brief point-of-view shots from Thomas' car as he drives through London shot in early morning light. Antonioni takes many of the ideas about color announced in *Red Desert* and develops them further in *Blow-Up*. While the earlier film uses color in a very calculated, classical, studied way creating composed static shots that express alienation and separation from Nature, *Blow-Up* has a more complex but apparently casual, even documentary feel to much of the material, a more open approach that is loaded with cultural contrasts and urban energy. In the same driving sequence early in the film a bright yellow truck passing quickly in front of the camera turns the screen into a field of cadmium yellow. The master cinematographer Carlo di Palma used crisp high contrast color—mimicking the work of the *Young Meteors*—but with an astute sense of theater. Antonioni had many of the shop fronts painted red and black, and he had the tree in the park that Thomas hides behind while taking pictures painted with translucent purple paint. This ties the park and



the studio together, integrating them pictorially and thematically. This formalist approach to color is something we would expect from a filmmaker such as Stan Brakhage, but unlike formalist films the properties of pure color are never separated from the documentary component that captures the street life of London in 1966. In fact this setting becomes a major player in the film—as much as the islands off the Italian coast play a major role in *L'Aventura*. These two aspects—the documentary and the formal—are in sync and edited musically as in counterpoint and then literally set to the music of Herbie Hancock, then working in a style of modal jazz derived from Miles Davis, very sympathetic to Antonioni's aesthetic.

Blow-Up constitutes a refusal at several levels of discourse simultaneously and this aspect of the film is in direct proportion to its obsessive fascination with images. The photograph that best sums up this refusal is Vanessa Redgrave as the mystery woman raising her arm up to cover her face with her hand and at the same time saying "Stop it!" We see it once as part of the action of the film and a second time as a black and white still image. In the story by Cortazar the photographer says: "...that my photograph, if I blew it up, would reconstitute things to their real nature." The photographer believes in photography as a means not simply to capture a fragment of mediated reality but to restore things to their original nature. Like the photographer in Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* Michel/Thomas might say "photography is truth—and film is truth 24 times a second."²⁴ The photographer is after a Newtonian reality that he can seize literally at the push of a button (or a shutter). What he finds instead is a world described by Heisenberg and Bohr in which the viewer's respective reality is relative to other realities in an almost infinite possible arrangement of intersections. The big or objective picture turns out to be a fantasy, first, because the viewer is in flux and exists only in relation to other observers, and secondly because the viewer affects the event in ways that remain unforeseen and unknowable. What Cortazar's story and Antonioni's film suggests is that there is in fact no objective viewpoint or essence or single truth at all. The narrative of *Blow-Up* questions the very possibility of conventional narratives to create order and meaning except through a process of simplification that the film refuses to accept. The full depth of reality with ambiguities intact is—for once—allowed space to exist in a feature narrative film. That is why the arrangement of Thomas' pictures is neither a storyboard illustrating a basic murder plot using traditional storytelling conventions—that is *continuity*—or its opposite, a storyboard using a fragmented collage aesthetic—that is *discontinuity*. The film takes a much more subtle approach. For example when Thomas enters the park for the first time the director shifts the camera angle from outside the park as he enters to inside the park using a moving camera from some distance away as if it might be a point-of-view shot—suggesting that Thomas is being watched. It is a suggestion only and remains ambiguous. At that moment the wind rustling the branches is emphasized on the soundtrack—as if the natural world were subtly announcing its entrance. A park is where we are meant to go and experience the pleasures of a civilized oasis that simulates Nature for our pleasure—hence the ubiquity of lovers in a park. This oasis is there to act as a counterpoint to urban speed and is a place to rest the eyes—perhaps to lower our defenses. In *Blow-Up* the park and its mysterious woman with a secret becomes another expulsion from Eden—an Arcadia that is already hopelessly corrupted by an unknowable reality—a fall that seems to keep recurring as in a dream. Thomas returns four times in the course of the film,

whose fictional time frame lasts approximately 24 hours.

One key to understanding Thomas' dilemma is by looking at the two kinds of photography that he wants to master. There is on the one hand fashion photography that has a hopelessly fetishistic relation to the surface of things; and there is documentary work that seeks to pass beyond the surface of things and understand "reality" in all its messy complexity. Our photographer/detective has a certain underlying contempt for fashion—despite the fact that he is obviously good at it and it earns him a fabulous income. And perhaps for this very reason—it is a field that he has already conquered. He also places a great deal of faith in documentary—a field in which he has yet to prove himself. Why the anger towards fashion—that he can freely exhibit in front of his models—and the idealization of photojournalism? This is John Berger: "During the second half of the 20th century the judgment of history has been abandoned by all except the underprivileged and dispossessed. The industrialized 'developed' world, terrified of the past, blind to the future lives within an opportunism which has emptied the principle of justice of all credibility. Such opportunism turns everything—nature, history, suffering, other people, catastrophes, sport, sex, politics—into spectacle. And the implement used to do this—until the act becomes so habitual that the conditioned imagination may do it alone—is the camera."²⁵ Susan Sontag articulates a similar idea more succinctly: "A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anaesthetize the injuries of class, race and sex."²⁶ Thomas constructs a portfolio of images of the underclass as a counterbalance to his fashion work that he sees—correctly—as simply a cog in the machinery of spectacle. In a sense in fashion he is merely a tool of the corporate state—albeit a very well paid tool. His work in the poor house is the necessary dose of reality necessary for his own sanity and sense of self-worth as an artist. But the photographs in the park are another matter. They resist the summarizing truths of metaphor and genre typical of photojournalism devoted to the suffering of the disenfranchised—despite the fact that they record a murder; and they resist the facile fascination with beauty typical of fashion—despite the fact that a beautiful woman has been photographed. They simply don't work in the categories of fashion or documentary, but they implicitly reference both. The photograph that captures reality escapes the categories of genre by which we come to understand photography—it's the photograph that cannot be named.

The film itself explores this mysterious, highly charged and unstable space in a way suggested by Thomas' pictures. He in a sense has intimations of the themes articulated in the film when he attempts to construct a narrative using the pictures he took in the park, but he cannot successfully extrapolate any meaning from them. The film does—asking in very astute ways how the irrepressible details—the sensuality of an image—comes to affect us emotionally and intellectually? How does the art component of photography affect the documentary component and vice-versa? What role does genre play in how we read and categorize images? What is the relationship between subjectivity and representation? Antonioni does not answer such questions but poses them in ways that anticipate the critical reactions to images by critics such as Baudrillard, Sontag and Deleuze later in the century. For example Baudrillard claims that the massive proliferation and saturation of images in a media obsessed culture and the resultant mediation of "reality" by images is fundamentally antagonistic to lived experience. In Baudrillard's language we as

a culture have “murdered” the real and created a world in which simulation has become not simply analogous to but inherent to the thing itself—therefore we are immersed in fantasy—a hall of mirrors. Antonioni’s film captures the formation—the foundations of this new world.

3. Go Against the Beat

Thomas remarks on his first (and only) conversation in his studio with the mystery woman played by Vanessa Redgrave that she has what it takes to be a model because “not many girls can stand like that”. She is of course at the heart of the mystery. In a strange sense it’s her narrative—she is in control of it—as so often happens in Antonioni films—women seem to subtly permeate what Pasolini helpfully called “the camera consciousness”²⁷ of the film. She straddles various possible identities that we have come to know from genre films but does not snugly fit any of them. She could almost be a *femme fatale* but not quite. She is beautiful enough to be a model but the look on her face is lived in and her nervous demeanor speaks of conflicting emotions and doubts that are not the stuff of fashion. She could be the bright and pretty woman that is the mate that Thomas needs—but not quite. She looks at her watch in the midst of a flirtatious laugh and realizes that it’s time to go with the earnestness of someone who already has a serious schedule to keep and no time to lose on casual fun—she doesn’t take Thomas very seriously. Then what is she? Our clues are minimal. We know that her life would become a disaster if Thomas made public the pictures in the park. “Nothing like a little disaster to shake things up” replies Thomas with the cheek of someone very young who has never known disaster. She’s involved in a narrative that is fundamentally closed to us and which we catch only in the glimpses that Thomas sees. We can only infer that the situation is serious from her nervous pacing, the fact that she attacks Thomas in a futile attempt to get his camera, the fact that she finds where he lives by some means that she refuses to reveal, and that she is somehow involved in the ransacking of his studio to take the pictures by force. The last time that we see her—significantly from his point-of-view—she seems to literally disappear into a small crowd of pedestrians casually strolling on a London Summer evening in 1966. Thomas also vanishes in the final moment of the film via a movie trick pioneered by Melies—the jump cut that makes objects appear and disappear. Antonioni is making us aware at the end that Thomas himself is an image, a fiction, and it is appropriate that he disappears into the vast empty field of the park—a green that at the end becomes like the flat space of a painting. All of the principal characters in the narrative vanish in the course of the film: the murder victim, the mystery woman and Thomas—and the narrative can be seen as a trace or a glimpse of their brief meeting before disappearing. This lends *Blow-Up* an aspect of the occult mystery that seems to lie just below the shiny surface of the film. This is articulated by David Alan Mellor: “It might be plausible to imagine that despite being an agent of modernization, Thomas may have stumbled across an ancient remnant within contemporary London, coming into contact with a parallel universe, a re-performance of a ritual episode from the *Golden Bough*, like the juxtapositions of temporal and spatial layers in *The Waste Land*—the leading of the patriarch to his death in a sacred grove”²⁸ The death and disappearance of the patriarch or the father in *The Golden Bough* does not, as in *Oedipus Rex* or *Hamlet*, signal the end of something (civilization or empire) but rather describes a ritual of Pagan regeneration—

a new beginning—that a culture can often perform without being fully cognizant of its meaning or its implications. There is a scene that would substantiate Mr. Mellor’s thesis beautifully described by Hubert Meeker: “When Thomas returns to look for evidence of murder Antonioni treats his repeated climb up the long steps into the park with the feeling of a pilgrimage, the labor of a quest, his progress through the night lighted by the neon gleam of a large sign, which seems to say nothing but simply registers its presence as a true sign, a primitive emblem casting its light on this natural preserve and the vulgar cadaver that it contains.”²⁹

Thomas’ hapless pursuit of the mystery woman lands him by chance at the *Ricky Tick Club*—a famous venue for working class people that showcased local bands such as *The Rolling Stones* who were regulars in the mid sixties. Antonioni carefully recreated the club in Elstree Studios outside of London in order to be able to shoot unimpeded by the many small rooms (in the real club) lined with black paper. More than one person involved in the making of the film—including the guitarist Jimmy Page—made the observation that when the *Yardbirds* played in clubs people danced ecstatically like mad for hours whereas Antonioni famously had his club goers listening to the music in a coma like state of inertia looking on blandly during a magnificent concert by *The Yardbirds* performing *Stroll On*—a remake of an earlier *Yardbirds* hit *Train Kept A-Rollin’* from their *Having a Rave Up* album released in 1965. The audience come to life only after Jeff Beck breaks his guitar and throws the neck of the guitar into the audience creating pandemonium as everyone scrambles for it. The zombified audience who occasionally look at the camera with indifference seem to haunt the film in a peculiar way that is disturbing, enigmatic and psychologically powerful. What are we to make of it? This is Antonioni: “We know that under the revealed image there is another one which is more faithful to reality, and under this one there is yet another, and again another under this last one, down to the true image of that absolute, mysterious reality that nobody will ever see.”³⁰ Surely this is part of Antonioni’s point—that the audience is expressing their inner life after the collapse of conventional religious foundations on the one hand and modernist beliefs in progress and technology on the other. The audience is left empty of all conventional meaning or direction dancing by themselves and staring off into an indeterminate space and at the camera. But in listening to this music we also sense that the audience is creating a new sensibility and a new approach to life that they themselves cannot yet articulate because it is too new. Antonioni’s camera manages to catch this new awareness in slow fluid traveling shots that—as Thomas says earlier to the mystery woman—“go against the beat”.

Bill, Thomas’ artist neighbor makes large paintings that fall somewhere between abstraction and figuration. There are glimpses of figures that one can “hang on to”—as Bill says in the film—but these snatches of fragmented realism are ambiguously rendered and impossible to locate in a clearly defined space. Bill shows Thomas an unfinished painting which is the one the photographer desperately wants—the one where nothing tangible has taken shape yet but is waiting to be discovered—or created. The painter’s wife Patricia, played by Sarah Miles seems to harbor some deep feelings for Thomas that remain unarticulated. The actress magnificently uses the casual banter of dialogue to express everything her character cannot say. This ambiguity extends to her clothing as she visits Thomas in his studio wearing a dress that appears to be see-through but it remains



unclear if it is or not. "Will you help me—I don't know what to do?" she asks while looking somewhat lost and needy. Again a fragment of narrative is introduced whose full meaning remains elusive—we can only see how these fragments affect the context of the narrative before us. What we can be sure of is that just as sexual desire and display plays a role in the search for "reality" earlier—it does so again with Patricia whose sexual and emotional needs are juxtaposed with the narrative in the park through the photographic blow-up lying between them that they both stare at on the floor. She makes the observation that Thomas' blow-ups look like her boyfriend's paintings—Thomas agrees but makes no further elaboration. Various narratives intersect in *Blow-Up* but there is no clear resolution or closure to these intersections—only emotional shifts as one narrative orbit passes close enough to another that it affects its gravitational arc in some profound way.

Bill's paintings—that resemble Thomas' enlargements—were made by the British artist Ian Stephenson who was 32 at the time of the film's production. Stephenson's work was obviously greatly influenced by Cubism, but a Cubism in existential crisis. The paintings seem on the point of evaporating into vast color fields of pointillist space borrowing devices freely from cubism, pointillism, landscape painting and abstraction. But the paintings refuse to settle on any of them, and to add insult to injury their shifts in focus and scale seem to be captured in-media-res. The "impurity" of the paintings is positively photographic. It is no wonder that Antonioni turned to them and was in turn influenced in his use of "cubist" space. That is, in the film surfaces and empty space are treated as planes of color compositionally within the frame. Their treatment as interlocking shapes inevitably flattens the deep space that Antonioni carefully constructs using deep focus liberally throughout the film, creating an unsettling push/pull with respect to his frame that both wants to be deep and flat simultaneously.

The photographs that Thomas has taken might alert us to the places where we humans make our brief entrances and our exits and where we intersect with histories large and small. Photography gets the transitory. The same can be said of Antonioni's *Blow-Up*—the paradoxes and contingencies in the film—which we are still in the process of experiencing in our time—are beautifully articulated. But the narrative is not a cul-de-sac or a prison house of visual language from which there is no escape. Near the end of the film Thomas comes upon the same Felliniesque group of young people that began the film scouring the London business district in a jeep, suggesting a post apocalyptic urban world. Now in the same park, that we visit for the last time, they huddle around a fenced off tennis court and watch two of their troupe play imaginary tennis. Dressed in theater or circus clothing they suggest creative delight, imaginative play and revolt (they carried picket signs in the beginning of the film). They are Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelasian revelers—inverting social hierarchies and flaunting their outsider status—but now instead of turning accepted social conventions on their ear they wander the city like nomads making a great deal of noise without saying a word. To the critic George Slover "the miming of the clowns creates not just a tennis game but, more fundamentally, a community, a sharing in a super-personal reality. Creation of community is, in fact, the end to which the making-believe is merely the means. The make-believe impulse arises, Antonioni shows, out of the pathos of isolation. When the act of suspend-

ing disbelief has run its course, the loner falls back into his estrangement. There is, then, a kind of guilt-in pathos in the effort to create a community by make-believe. It is the lyricism of this anguish which we hear—now faintly, now distinctly—throughout Antonioni's film."³¹ Slovers' beautiful prose gets the feeling that the troupe engenders, but there is also a disquieting aura about them as if they were travelers from the future who can explain their situation (and ours) only with mime and noises.

Thomas watches the group play a very serious game of imaginary tennis and when the imaginary ball rolls to where he stands the group mimes that he should enter the game and pick it up. Everyone turns to look at Thomas and the whole film seems to hang in the balance. Antonioni's camera follows the path of the imaginary ball with a beautiful tracking shot close to the ground. Thomas puts down his camera and throws the ball back. The lingering close-up of Thomas that comes a few seconds before the end of the film is one of the most beautiful close-ups in film history. While on the soundtrack we begin to hear the sound of a tennis game being played we see a face that for the first time in the film is seen reflecting—thinking—conveying a sense of empathy and acceptance. His is an existential awakening—and for doubting Thomas can some sense of humility be far behind? For the photographer/detective the tangents and the asides—the bits of everyday life were the destination all along. He's no longer in a hurry—now there's time. It is doubting Thomas' last card in a game already lost—but it's a good card—many philosophers play it.

Notes

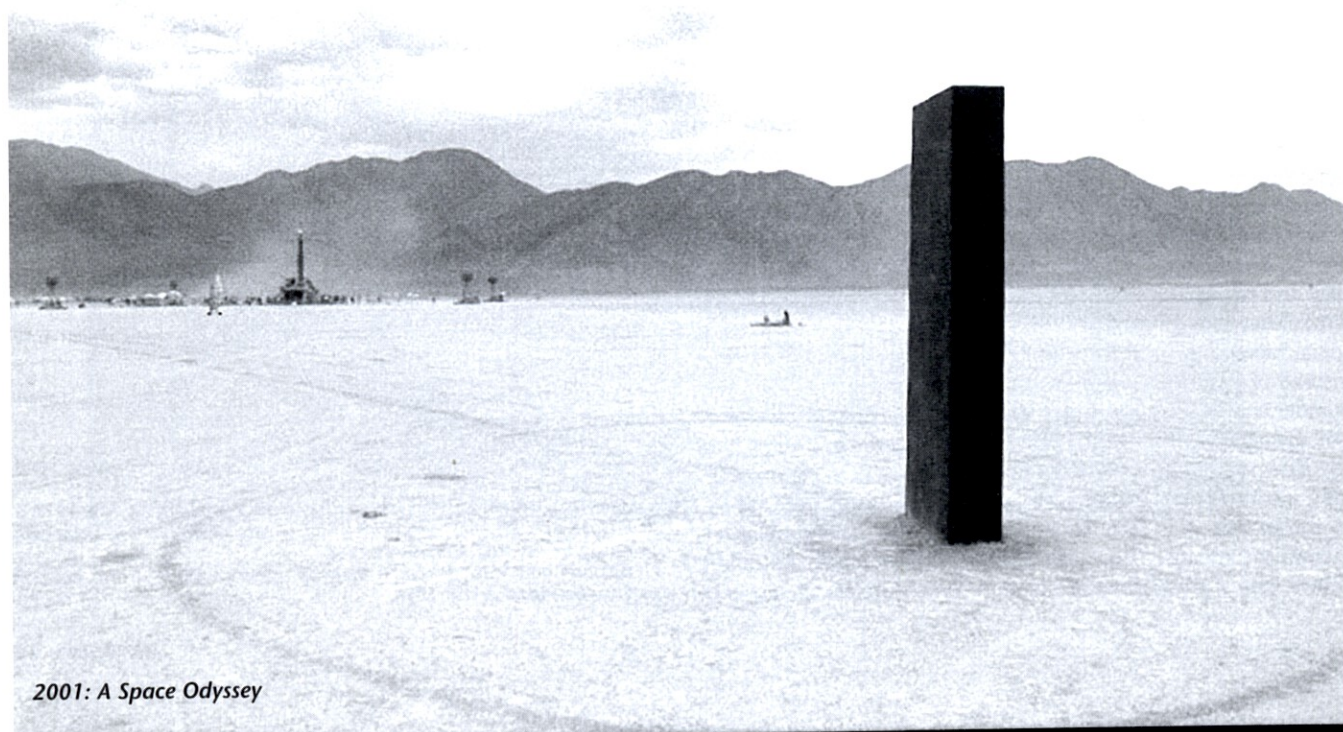
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Seeing-Eye Gods

CCTV AND SURVEILLANCE IN TATI'S AND KUBRICK'S 1960s SPACE ODYSSEYS

By BRIAN GIBSON

Jacques Tati's 1967 and Stanley Kubrick's 1968 cinema-altering journeys through time and space were, in and of themselves, lengthy, sprawling odysseys. Both wide-format (65mm; 70mm) shoots ran nearly two years (April 1965 to October 1966; December 1965 to September 1967) and both finished films ran more than two hours long; they opened four months apart, in Paris and in Washington respectively. The former choreographs the Chaplinesque, near-wordless physical comedy of human bodies in the interior spaces of a coolly modern office-tower block until punctuality and architectural order are ruptured; the latter orchestrates the balletic dance of anthropological past (hominids on earth) and sci-fi future (astronauts in space) in its eons-spanning tale of humans developing technology until the technology threatens to master them. Critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, in a 2010 essay published just before Toronto's Bell Lightbox screened restorations of the two films, points out not only one director's appreciation for the other, but the films' twin impact on cinéastes: "Tati himself, who admired Kubrick immensely for his craft, was a big fan of *2001*, but I have no idea what Kubrick thought of *Playtime*. By then many of my friends were squaring off by regarding either *2001* or *Playtime* as the great film of the modern era."¹ Rosenbaum discusses some of the films' visual similarities, in particular "the contrast in each between straight lines and circles, as well as between various stiff human interactions and the more playful and dancelike movements of both people and objects (including vehicles)."² Rosenbaum notes elsewhere that both Tati's and Kubrick's films try "to reeducate us by disrupting some of our basic habits in organizing visual and spatial data."³ But both films are among the first to emphasize contained, cubicle space, as if humans are trapped inside TV-like boxes (even as '60s cinema was trying to fight the rise of television). Both films also eerily echo each other in their profound preoccupation, signalled by similar shots,



2001: A Space Odyssey

with the kind of screen-surveillance culture that we now take for granted in the cubicle-dominated urban spaces of our technologically-developed world. Tati's film startlingly predicts Kubrick's use of a computer's red eye (the cyclopean HAL) in a scene that also offers a Kubrick-esque corridor shot; Tati goes on to merge cubicle-space with camera-space, predicting the West's fascination with closed-circuit television surveillance, which reappears (as videophones and security cameras) throughout the spaceships in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In their individually distinctive ways, these cinematic auteurs force us to re-examine how we organize space as screens, both dividing us from the chaotic outside world and allowing us to watch it from within a sanitized interior. In these two late '60s masterpieces, screen-space becomes a kind of insulating, cold, cerebral design for non-life or a detached, dispassionate life, keeping us from a larger, more playful natural environment.

Play Time begins in the public, free space of the outdoors, its title appearing among puffs of cloud in the open blue sky. But that space is then cut off by glass barriers and screens, both revealing yet keeping us from posing female figures, until men and women alike are contained within large, cubicle-like screens. The next shot is of a looming black tower, like the monolith in Kubrick's film, blotting out much of the blue sky (exact reproductions of a similar tower appear later at a travel agency, on advertisements for different cities around the world); metallic grays, jet blacks, and light-box whites will dominate the film. From the glass of that office tower, Tati cuts to a shot of glass separating us from two nuns, walking down a hall, their cornettes bouncing slightly, like the wings of a plane—we are in an airport, but it is unclear if we have just seen these aeronuns⁴ through glass or in the reflection of glass. Once they turn away from the camera, Tati cuts to a long corridor, to be echoed at greater length in the office building where Monsieur Hulot (Tati) has his interview. At one end stand some stewar-
dresses, one of them turning, now and again, in a glass box—she foreshadows the rotating, panopticon-like female receptionist in the office building. The red motif soon appears: first as flowers and present-like boxes (foreshadowing the flowers in the street-corner stall that Barbara takes a photo of and the

flowers that Monsieur Hulot will buy as a gift for Barbara at the film's end), then as a bullseye-like red circle (before which a Hulot-like silhouette and then the nuns stand; the circle is near the Arrivals/Departures gate, itself a play on our confusion as to whether people are coming or going), foreshadowing the red eye we will see so often throughout the film.

When Hulot arrives at the office tower, entering the glass doors, he enters a space that is private—owned by and housing an unknown company—but seems nominally public precisely because of its open, transparent, two-faced feature, as Philip Kemp notes in his audio commentary: “the ambivalent quality of glass, at once present and invisible, destroying privacy but cutting people off from each other, clearly preoccupied Tati no less than it obsessed architects of the period.”⁵ The glass quickly magnifies a sense of inhuman surveillance. When the short doorman turns to the large, computerized intercom-console, Hulot looks on curiously; above and behind him is a large photo-portrait of a stately, besuited man (presumably one of the company's founders or presidents). The console is a kind of screen whose buttons and patterns the doorman is attempting to decipher by looking at it but, even as he does, Hulot is watching him and, it seems, being looked down on by corporate masters via technology both old (a photo) and new (the console, through which his visit is being announced). Here is a colder, quieter update, for a proto-computer era (the first modern, basic computers began appearing in the 1940s), of Chaplin's factory-boss in *Modern Times* (1936) suddenly appearing on a screen in the bathroom to bark at the smoking Tramp, “Get back to work!” Mechanized, privatized, dehumanized, cold, top-down surveillance is at odds with the kind of watching Tati warmly welcomes us to employ: “the spectator's eye [is] left free to wander around the frame...[in this way, *Play Time* is] an invitation—look about you...[it is] a new, democratic approach to comedy.”⁶ We are led by both silent and quizzical gazes to the final eye, a red light that blinks on when the muttering, befuddled doorman presses a button to tell someone that Hulot is there. This glaring red circle at the centre of the screen—later reiterated by the underside of the Royal Garden restaurant's front entrance, where a pulsing red circle



tails off into an arrow pointing to the door—becomes playful, dancing red shapes at the film's festive climax: the red-and-white, corkscrew-like maypole at the centre of a traffic circle, a revolving red-and-white-striped cement mixer, a red-and-white plastic trumpet, a red car moving up and down on a hoist, and various children's bobbing red balloons (perhaps in homage to Albert Lamorisse's 1956 classic children's film⁷). On the console, the light seems sonic—"the angry red light in the middle of the intercom seems the visual equivalent of the abrupt, incomprehensible squawk that issues from it"⁸—but it is the steadily blinking epitome of a surveillance-culture where watching has become impassive, to the point of often being detached from any known human source.

Tati emphasizes this jarring separation of us from humans who once warmly and personally met eye-to-eye with the next cut—to a startlingly Kubrick-like shot of a long, long corridor, pillars on both sides, ending at a distant, lightbox-ish square that itself seems like a far, far, faraway screen. Kubrick's hallway shots—most famously in *The Shining*, with blood pouring out of an elevator into a hallway and Danny riding his Big Wheel around the long, carpeted hotel hallways,⁹ but also in *Full Metal Jacket* and in *2001: A Space Odyssey*¹⁰—tend to behold a chilling, ominous space that is slowly, hypnotically leading character and story on to a faraway point of madness or near-madness; eye and mind merge in this near-infinite architectural recess as the camera gazes on, fascinated by the abyss tapering away ahead of us.¹¹ In *Play Time*, after the unintelligible, processed sounds from the one-eyed console, we now wait and watch (like Hulot) for the human to emerge, our view narrowing along the one-point perspective—a distance telescoped by Tati's decision "to shoot in widescreen, in [65mm], with its added clarity and depth."¹² When will the human come out of that faraway screen at the end of the hall to re-enter the world along this strange, cold birth canal? When a man does, after a walk so long that it takes 37 seconds of screen time (thus redefining this cold modern world's new temporal and spatial gulfs between people), he ushers Hulot into a glassed-off, box-like waiting-room where a more confident, snappy, younger Hulot lookalike soon waits, too. In that waystation, the corporate surveillance of the watching man and the red eye merge in the photo-portraits that ring the room, all of various stately, besuited men gazing down; though it was not clear from the first shot of the first portrait behind and above Hulot, it is now apparent that each man's lapel, at Hulot's eye level, sports a red object the same size as the console's cyclopean light.

Machine and human further merge even as they further imprison when Tati falteringly follows his greeter, M. Giffard, into a grid of box-like rooms; in the centre of this sterile, ordered labyrinth is an über-modern creature—a half-console, half-female dispatcher-receptionist. Sitting in a booth, her lower half obscured by a metal console on which she presses buttons and from which she takes phone calls, switching people through to the desired box-cubicle and its resident, her upper half is revealed by glass that also seals her in. She turns (presumably on a swivel stool) to, by chance, face Hulot every time that he passes—she is a happenstance surveiller. To add to her cyclopean effect, when Hulot and we had looked down on the 4-by-6 grid of cubicles from above, it was clear that, as with the blinking red eye in the centre of the rectangular console, the receptionist-dispatcher moves in regular motions on a fixed position in the centre of a patterned grid containing activity within its seemingly programmed spaces. So a hive of human

workers in their cubicles echoes a mechanical console, with a seemingly all-seeing eye blinking away at the centre of both mechanical systems. The merger is fitting, for "the cubicle has its roots in the cybernetic school of thought that arose in the middle of the last century...the cybernetic idea of seeing the world in terms of information flows grew out of government-sponsored World War II military research and into the information technology industry of Silicon Valley. In the 1960s and 1970s, cybernetic ideas [led various workers in the field of what is now information technology] to think of everything from bee behavior to dance parties to computer programming as information processes."¹³

Yet it is not at work but in the home where, in *Play Time*, cubicles most radically and dystopian-ly converge with closed-circuit television, as '60s bourgeois families turn their home-life into screen-space. In the only sequence set in private domestic space in the film, a sequence itself long closed off from the public by Tati, for it was "missing from the film until it was restored shortly before Tati's death, in late 1982,"¹⁴ Hulot runs into an old army friend and visits him and his family at an apartment complex. The complex visually rhymes with the airport lounge in its lettered sections, while the overhang at its entrance looks ahead to the restaurant entrance; the rooms' black chairs and the shape of the rooms, though, recall the office tower's waiting-room, cubicles, and trade-fair exhibition stalls. We see the complex in medium shot and as if we are standing on the sidewalk; the complex is a series of box-like rooms, its street-facing wall fully glassed so that we and other passersby can see in, while Schneller and his family and their neighbours look at screens (TV, a slide-projection screen) next to the narrow walls separating apartments, so that it looks as if they are staring at each other. Domestic life is partitioned yet seems to be witnessed by neighbours and passing strangers as if family life rushes ("schnell" means quick or fast) not-quite-so-swimmingly and ever-so-surreally along in aquarium tanks; the television screen becomes the defining space and unit of private family life. Neighbouring family units seem barely closed off from each other, always bordering on intrusion—if they are not happening to watch the same program at the same time, it seems from the outside as if they are watching each other, their lives separated by a film-thin barrier. The new, '50s and '60s middle-class rituals of dinner near or in front of the television set become displayed and surveilled in these sets of "living" rooms, with the bourgeoisie as placidly removed yet observable as anthropological specimens or zoo creatures (this effect is enhanced by an unreadable sign—like a plaque that explains an exhibit—standing just above a fringe of flora and at the bottom of the glass case-like apartment where we see Tati meet Schneller's family). The dominant mode of living—under or through surveillance—is marked by a woman who looks down, presumably for her husband, from just behind the window of a second-floor apartment. After Schneller shows Hulot some of his modern conveniences, he switches on the television; soon, a woman in the neighbouring apartment, surrounded by similar furniture, turns on the TV for herself and her mother, and then, upstairs, a woman switches on the TV for herself and her husband. Giffard enters, barely separated from Hulot, the man he was supposed to lead to a meeting but never did, in the next apartment. People seem to react to their neighbours' movements, although really they are reacting to a gesture or to dialogue, unheard by us, in their own space: Giffard's wife touches his injured nose as Schneller winces . . . in reaction to an image on



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the TV; Giffard's wife glares towards the wall as if blaming Hulot for what he did to her husband, though she is responding to the TV. After Hulot leaves, Schneller takes off his jacket and suspenders while Giffard's wife looks on, as if watching him strip and voyeuristically cheating on her husband, who casually walks by outside with the dog. Meanwhile, we are led to intently spy on all of them; the audience becomes seeing-eye gods, beholding non-neighbours who alternate between private, viewing subject and public, viewed object. The residents watch their image-boxes within their living-boxes that have become image-boxes of bourgeois home-life switched on for us to watch. And in the far left of the screen, beyond and behind this complex of closed-off yet linked televisual spaces, there flashes from a billboard, glowing red and eyelike, a pair of glasses. Like the bespectacled eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg in *The Great Gatsby*, advertising reveals the truth under-lying this world—a world where people watch but never truly connect, where glass screens offer the illusion of transparency while standing as deceptively thin barriers between look-alike, dehumanized spaces, and where television itself may seem a wondrous new unifying technology close-up but, seen in passing, at medium-shot, it insulates and separates and removes us from both the uncontained outdoors and the freer play of community with others.¹⁵

In this sequence, where humdrum, work-cubicle-contained middle-class lives play out on adjoining screens for us, Tati predicts the phenomenon of "Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) . . . a television transmission system in which live or prerecorded signals are sent over a closed loop to a finite and predetermined

group of receivers."¹⁶ While "closed-circuit television" today is synonymous with camera-surveillance systems, "CCTV technology dates back to the earliest years of television. In the 1930s and 1940s, writers such as *New York Times* columnist Orrin Dunlap...envisioned CCTV systems for supervising factory workers and for visually coordinating production in different areas of a factory, and anticipated CCTV systems replacing pneumatic tubes in office communications."¹⁷ In Tati's film, office cubicles are remade in the home, where they are turned into model-planned, domestic screen-spaces, with conformist interior lives on show for passersby, much like the middle-class consumer products on display at the trade-exposition for browsing shoppers. The CCTV-cubicles of Schneller's complex are, in this way, advertising a uniform, predictable, rigid middle-class lifestyle; indeed, "Today's 'on-site' media industry, which places video advertising monitors in grocery stores, shopping malls, and other retail sites, dates back to a series of tests involving closed circuit advertising in department stores that took place in the 1940s."¹⁸ By implication, too, the glassed-in rooms of office tower, trade-fair, and apartment complex expose those inside, containing them in an unseen viewer's or our voyeuristic gaze: "In prisons, CCTV systems reduce the costs of staffing and operating observation towers and make it possible to maintain a constant watch on all areas of the facility. CCTV is also used as a means of monitoring performance in the workplace."¹⁹ In moving from the office tower to look in on the worker at home, Tati anticipated the expansion of CCTV into public spaces, where the power of the policing state is expanded, even more

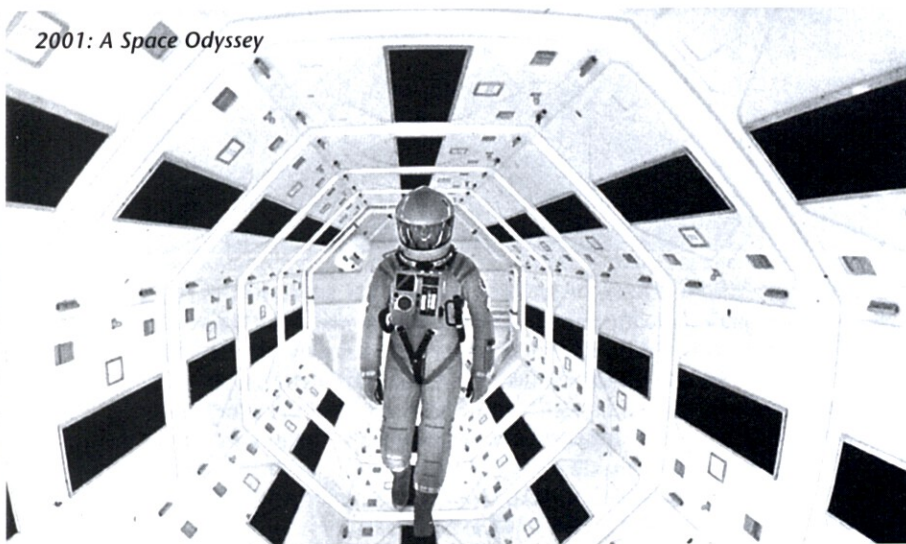
visibly demonstrated, yet depersonalized, "vested...in the electronic eye of the camera."²⁰ As early as 1960 and 1964, London police and Liverpool police, respectively, tried out secret CCTV filming of crowds and public spaces²¹; by 1969, CCTV cameras had been permanently installed by the Met "in the most politically sensitive area" of England's capital.²² While it is unlikely that Tati knew of such TV-surveillance trials, it is possible that Kubrick (famous for his background research, information indexes, and archives) read about them—the Liverpool police's experiment and the use of CCTV by British Railways were mentioned in February 1965 and June 1965 articles, respectively, in *The Times*.²³

In Kubrick's film, a container-like workplace, also a home-away-from-home, drifting far from earth, is the site of a computer's closed-circuit surveillance of men in a future where most of them seem lonely, detached, and clinically dutiful; screen-space has progressed to the point where humans navigate space with the help of computer screens even as they are themselves monitored, surveilled, and screened by the computer, HAL (falsely believed, because each initial falls one alphabet-position earlier, to refer to IBM; the first "self-learning" computer program was executed on a machine in an IBM lab in 1956). *2001's* first shot of a man in space is of Dr. Heywood Floyd asleep in a chair in front of a screen, but there are also many

screens in the plane's cockpit and through the window appears the space station; we soon see the plane approaching through a cinema screen-sized window in the station. When Floyd enters the station, a Tati-like receptionist sitting at a cubicle (reputedly the first appearance of the pioneering "Action II" cubicle on film) greets him; in the station, Floyd must talk to a screen for a "Voice Print Identification," he calls home to wish his daughter "Happy Birthday" on a videoscreen (echoed later when Poole watches a screen to see his parents' prerecorded "Happy Birthday" message), and a long hall has banks of screens in it; Floyd talks to base personnel at Clavius in a room with a lightbox-like, screen-sized rectangle on each wall (echoed later by the lightbox-like tiles on the floor in Bowman's vision of his older self in palatial rooms). Screens, in this coolly dispassionate and eerily subdued human future, are mediums for casual self-regard and self-monitoring, as when Bowman and Poole eat dinner in front of the screens showing their own interviews with BBC World Tonight. Screens—like the red eye of HAL, in which we see Bowman and Poole—reflect us back to ourselves, and the humans in space here are always programming, moderating, and mechanizing themselves, even as HAL, the machine, quietly grows paranoid, scheming, and murderous. HAL's console is full of screens—showing acronyms, schematics, readouts, or surveillance images—that HAL monitors

simultaneously, as the ultimate in a panoptical Big Brother, while HAL's camera-lens-like red "eye" stands at the top of a black rectangle resembling, in miniature, each alien-made black monolith that the film, and humans, follow, telescoping us into space, from Earth (Part I) to the moon (Part II) to Jupiter (Part III) and then "Beyond the Infinite" (Part IV). Even as we are led farther into outer space, we are led deeper into inner-space—this telescoping is visualized by Kubrick's corridor shots, leading us towards and into the centre of the screen but also seeming to lead us into the centre of the eye (particularly HAL's and Bowman's eyes) and beyond, into consciousness, whether that of a dying computer's or a surviving human's (culminating in Bowman's journey "beyond the infinite"—a hyper-speed, time-warping trip to moments of his death and rebirth). And so, in a film increasingly about one human's and one machine's visual apprehension and interpretation of a situation, the eye is the camera's only way into the mind—that is, "the condition of that eye, and of the mind behind it, can certainly influence his [or its] perception of reality."²⁴

In a film of surveillance-container spaces within surveillance-container spaces, our eyes are focused by the camera's eye on other eyes. The camera closes in on HAL's camera-like eye in the centre of his panoptical console. This surveilling eye trumps speech (most human dialogue is purposefully flat or banal), as when the pod in which Bowman and Poole discuss possibly disabling HAL is an eye-shaped craft and HAL's eye looks into it, reading lips. The sun-like yellow at the centre (or "iris") of HAL's red eye is echoed by the yellow suit of Poole as we follow the drifting, dying astronaut at the centre of the tracking screen on Bowman's console and at the centre of a window in his pod. We look at Bowman's piercing grey eyes, looking out beneath his brow, for flickers



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of emotion as he tries to maintain calm in the face of a computer exiling him into the depths and death of outer space. Later, as Bowman is overcome by the space- and time-warping trip that the Jupiter monolith launches him on, "Movement is restored to him, yet the 'frozen' aspect of his vision persists in the hysterical expression of his eye and the involuntary reflex of his blinking. The colour of his eye's iris is determined entirely by what it perceives...The inherent color of [Bowman's] eye is overwhelmed by his bizarre environment. Rather than absorbing and processing incoming impressions, Bowman is redefined by them."²⁵ Technology began as weaponry (for the hominids in Part I), then became prostheses for human beings, extensions of our mastery, but then turned into huge cubicle-like crafts, distancing us from earth, taking us farther out into space, and making us more and more dependent on machines for protection and safety until an unknown technology, fabricated long ago by another species, launches Bowman into a possibly new phase of humankind (represented by the Star Child, in an eye-shaped bubble, gazing at a luminous earth); technology alters what it means to be human. But technology is also, ultimately, a means to a future evolution—our perception will be overwhelmed and dictated by a cosmic greatness, a force beyond the human that will make us different beings.

While Tati's film is about breaking us out of our screened-in and screening-out cubicles, bringing us back down to earth and to unpredictable, comic play, Kubrick's film wonders, in cold awe, if we will manage to transcend our self-dehumanizing, self-mechanizing reliance on technology. If there is some uncertainty and irresolution in both works as to whether or not we humans can leave our tele-boxed spaces, that may be because both films relied so heavily on carefully engineered, camera-worked, extensive sets themselves. *Play Time* and *2001*, so radical in their re-imagining of film-time and film-space for stories where humans would find themselves in an unpredictable world beyond their control, relied more heavily and expensively on careful, precise, planned-out design than almost any cinematic work before them. Perhaps the prediction of a dominant surveillance-screen culture is a projection of these two auteurs as controlling authorities surveilling their own workspaces. But now, so many years later, these two classics can be appreciated, again and again, as carefully programmed and predictable spaces, contained on our screens, for our safe, removed viewing pleasure. In a time of screen-space that these two films predicted, when people text and Tweet about a TV show they PVRed, Tati's and Kubrick's large-format re-visions of screen-time and screen-space are rarely projected in full running length on the large screens they were intended for, but more often caught on TV or laptop screens, frozen in still-images online, or cut down to short clips on YouTube. These two cinematic examinations of our increased containment by screens and CCTV have themselves become contained and controlled by our screen-culture—the medium of their warning-message now mediates that message. Yet both end on notes of childish play and childish hope and with a gaze up to the sky and back towards the earth from amid the stars—looks to an outer-ness beyond the confines of cubicle, ship, or screen. Both films end by reminding us of the pull of the natural, of that greatness beyond our narrow, contained, box-like screen-spaces. These two auteurs, recognizing the limits of their art's authority, were well aware that there is more—not on that glowing screen but beyond the cinema doors. Now turn away, go out, and find it.

NOTES

- Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Lines and Circles [PLAYTIME and 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY]," *JonathanRosenbaum.com*, <<http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=28673>>. Originally posted in *Moving Image Source*, Dec. 3, 2010.
- Ibid. There is also a comparison of the two films online—a ten-minute segment of a full-length project, "2001: Play Time," where *2001*, *Play Time*, and *Star Wars* run simultaneously, is on YouTube at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlnqLkQYJc>>. The uploader sees Tati's film as the "influence" that bridges Lucas' "very Kubrick-esque film of modernist alienation *THX 1138*" and his "more comedic playful films . . . *American Graffiti* and . . . *Star Wars*."
- Rosenbaum, "The Dance of Playtime[sic]," *Play Time* [1967; dir. Jacques Tati], The Criterion Collection, 2006 [DVD]. Republished online at <<http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/446-the-dance-of-playtime>>.
- This visual gag, shot in 1965 or 1966, uncannily presages the American TV series *The Flying Nun*, which premiered in September 1967 and concerned a nun (Sally Field) who is so light that gusts of wind pick her up and, with her wing-like cornette, she can fly.
- Philip Kemp, "Selected Scene Commentary," *Play Time* [1967; dir. Jacques Tati], The Criterion Collection, 2006 [DVD].
- Ibid.
- In addition to this *The Red Balloon* reference, Tati alludes to another classic post-war film that imaginatively explored Paris' cityspace. In a hotel lobby, a young man—in a yellow t-shirt advertising the newspaper—wonders aloud if anyone wants the "Herald Tribune" he is carrying the latest edition of, echoing the moment when Patricia (Jean Seberg), wearing the same t-shirt, cries "New York Herald Tribune!" on the street in Godard's *Breathless* [*À bout de souffle*] (1960).
- Kemp, op. cit.
- Scott Chandler has posted video of the many hallway shots in *The Shining* at <<http://vimeo.com/15289433>>.
- Scott Chandler has posted video of the many hallway shots in *2001: A Space Odyssey* at <<http://vimeo.com/15289367>>.
- For more on Kubrick's use of hallway space in his films, see Paolo Cherchi Usai, "Kubrick as Architect," *Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies* 9:1 (1998): 126, 128-36. <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/cine/1998/v9/n1/024776ar.pdf>>. Translated by A. Blake Trecartin. First published in Gian Piero Brunetta, ed., *Stanley Kubrick: Tempo, spazio, storia, e mondi possibili* (Parma: Pratiche, 1985): 201-18. For a montage of clips emphasizing Kubrick's recurrent use of one-point perspective, especially down hallways, see the video posted by "kogonada" at <<http://vimeo.com/48425421>>.
- Kemp, op. cit.
- David Franz, "The Moral Life of Cubicles: The Utopian Origins of Dilbert's Workspace," *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society* 19 (Winter 2008): 133. <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/docLib/20080324_TNA19StateOfTheArtCubicles.pdf>.
- Rosenbaum, "Lines and Circles."
- For a diagram of this scene, with an overview of how it fits into the film's criticism of modern space, see Mehruss John Ahi and Armen Karaoghlanian, "Playtime," *Interiors* 9 (September 2012): 1-3. <<http://issuu.com/interiorsjournal/docs/interiors0912>>.
- Anna McCarthy, "Closed Circuit Television," *The Museum of Broadcast Communications*, <<http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=closedcircuit>>.
- Ibid.
- Ibid.
- Ibid.
- Nicholas R. Fyfe, "City Watching: closed circuit television surveillance in public spaces," *Area* 28:1 (1996): 39. Fyfe focusses on Glasgow, the setting for Andrea Arnold's Cannes Jury Prize-winning *Red Road* (2006), about a CCTV camera-operator's private grief over a fatal accident in public space. The policing of public space by camera predates CCTV, though—as early as 1935, police in Chesterfield, England were surreptitiously filming street betting from afar with cameras to crack down on the illegal practice; see the video at <<http://blip.tv/surveillance-and-society/police-filming-english-streets-in-1935-1668122>> (accompanying a 2009 article by Chris A. Williams, James Patterson, and James Taylor in *Surveillance and Society*).
- Chris A. Williams, "Police Surveillance and the Emergence of CCTV in the 1960s," *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 5:3 (July 2003): 30-31.
- Ibid., 32.
- Ibid., 36 (Notes 40, 47).
- Randy Rasmussen, *Stanley Kubrick: Seven Films Analyzed* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 105.
- Ibid., 104.

The Actress

ART AND REALITY

By RICHARD LIPPE

George Cukor's *The Actress* (1953) is a consistently overlooked film. In part this reaction may stem from the fact that the work, in scale and subject matter, suggests a modest project. Additionally, *The Actress*, which is based on Ruth Gordon's autobiographical play, *Years Ago*, has been eclipsed by the critical successes of the four Ruth Gordon/Garson Kanin/George Cukor collaborations. The film, in fact, is treated often as the least significant of the various projects that involved Gordon and/or Kanin with Cukor. Yet, *The Actress*, in addition to embodying Cukor's thematic concerns, admirably illustrates again his ability to respond to a project with original and fresh approach.

The Actress belongs to the small town domestic comedy genre and, given that it is a period film, it is a piece of Americana in the tradition of Minnelli's classic *Meet Me in St. Louis* Preminger's *Centennial Summer* and Sirk's *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?* As is often the case with such films, the critical response is to perceive the work as frivolous, sentimental and nostalgic, with the filmmakers being seen as treating the past as a time of innocence and comfort for the contemporary viewer. In effect, the film(s) is regarded as politically conservative, reinforcing the dominant ideological values, but (as Andrew Britton argues in his piece on *Meet Me in St. Louis*¹) this isn't necessarily the case. In Britton's intelligent and persuasive reading, Minnelli's film provides a critique of the ideological values it purportedly celebrates. Similarly, Cukor's film also functions to undercut the ideological expectations of a generic construct that seems to exist primarily to reaffirm patriarchal/bourgeois/capitalist ideology.

There are, of course, significant differences between Minnelli's film and *The Actress*, not the least being that *Meet Me in St. Louis* is a Technicolor musical, privileging spectacle, excess and stylization. Also, it is centred on a teenage heroine, Esther Smith/Judy Garland, who aspires to nothing more ambitious than convincing herself and the boy-next-door that he is her ideal and, consequently, future husband. The Smiths' are fairly affluent, living in a huge, plushly furnished house. In contrast, *The Actress*, which is photographed in black and white, deals with the low income Jones family, who live in a house which, as Cukor's mise-en-scene stresses, is cramped, characterized by constricting spaces and affords no privacy. The film is also grounded in a realist aesthetic that reinforces the 'ordinary', day-to-day aspects of the characters' lives. Nevertheless, Ruth Jones/Jean Simmons, like Esther Smith, is not a totally unfamiliar figure of the small town-domestic comedy. Ruth, who is seventeen, imaginative but a bit naive, wants to be an actress. But, in addition to having no professional theatrical experience, she

must face the disapproval of her commonsensical father, Clinton/Spencer Tracy, a man of little formal education who barely supports his family, holding a low-paying, menial job. The most extravagant aspect of Ruth's life and image is her clothing that her mother sews. Ruth's clothes are inspired by the costumes she sees in theatre magazines and reflect her wish to be a part of that world of daring and glamour. *The Actress*, in foregrounding that the Joneses are an impoverished family, makes Ruth's desire to be an actress, which she thinks will make her rich and famous, both understandable and seemingly foolish.

Not only do *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *The Actress* take opposite visual approaches, the films differ in their respective handling of familiar conventions of the small town domestic comedy. In particular, I am thinking of the use of the patriarchal figure, the head of the family. In Minnelli's film, Mr. Smith conforms to the demands of the genre: he is associated with the business world and has little actual power within the household, which is controlled by his wife and children. Mr. Smith is impotent whenever he tries to assert himself on family matters, making him a comic figure for the viewer. Although Clinton Jones is sometimes an amusing figure and the film places him in several farcical situations in which he embarrasses himself, as when he loses his gym suit pants during a public callisthenics performance, the character cannot be read as an emasculated figure. Rather, he presents a genuine challenge to the daughter and her goals. Ruth, in wanting an actress, is breaking with the expectations her father has for her. Jones, insisting his daughter have a profession, thinks she should be a gymnastics teacher, and makes no attempt to find out what she really wants. As the film progresses, Ruth becomes increasingly involved in surreptitiously enacting a plan to go to New York City and try her hand at a career in the theatre and, ultimately, confronts her father on the issue. Ruth stands up to the patriarchal authority Jones embodies and, in doing so, gains his respect and help. In *The Actress*, the daughter's movement into adulthood is aligned to her gaining the freedom to determine her own identity and, with it, independence.

By making Jones a potent male figure, the film intriguingly pushes its thematic concerns into the area of the Western genre. Jones gained the authority he holds in the household through his past experience as a sailor. From his initial appearance in the narrative onward, Jones keeps reminding his family and whoever enters the house, including Ruth's teenage girlfriends, about his seafaring days and his masculine adventures. His proud possession connecting him to this past life is



a 'spyglass', a small but high quality telescope. The constant reference Jones makes to his youthful wanderings and experiences are visibly juxtaposed to his contemporary domestic existence, which is dominated by his inability to be more than a barely adequate family provider. While the film makes it clear that Jones, in actuality, values his role as a husband and father and loves his family, it also stresses his anger at having to admit to being a financial failure. Unfortunately for Ruth and her mother, Clinton's resentment and anger is often taken out in their presence, as he launches into a tirade over seemingly minor issues.

The settling vs. wandering tension Clinton expresses becomes significant to Ruth because she, like her father, wants freedom, adventure and the ability to experience the unknown. Several critics have faulted the film for not assuring the viewer that Ruth has talent (as the real-life Ruth Gordon Jones did), citing the scene in which she awkwardly performs for her parents. But, clearly, the film isn't about her talent to be an actress. It is, instead, concerned with Ruth's determination and need to define her self as she sees fit.

If Clinton is an unlikely husband-father figure for a small town domestic comedy, so is Ruth's mother, Annie Jones/Teresa Wright, who doesn't really fit the genre's image of the matri-

arch, presiding with commonsense and wisdom over her household. Not unlike her husband, Annie Jones may be a bit foolish and self-indulgent, but she doesn't come across as being flighty or incapable of connecting to the world around her. Rather, Mrs. Jones is an intelligent woman who attempts both to fulfil her function as a wife-mother and express herself as an individual and equal member of the family. Mrs. Jones may not succeed always in asserting herself, as occurs when she is ignored by Clinton and Ruth during an intense discussion between the two over Ruth's future, but her less than forceful manner doesn't relegate her to the role of a minor functionary in the family. It is indicated early on in the film that Mrs. Jones knows of Ruth's ambition to become an actress and is essentially her ally, although her attitude suggests that she questions the seriousness of Ruth's claim. Yet, later, it is Mrs. Jones who encourages Ruth to tell her father, when he begins to make plans to enrol Ruth in a physical culture school, she wants to be an actress. Clinton's willingness to take seriously Ruth's wishes is based partly on his awareness that his wife supports their daughter's decision.

Ruth Gordon and Cukor create characters that are individualized in their thinking and behaviour, making the Jones family members more human and bringing freshness to the material.

For example, early on in the film, in a long take, semi-comic scene, Clinton, in an attempt to help keep expenses down, reviews the grocery bill with his wife. As the scene develops, Clinton becomes increasingly irritated by her responses to his questions regarding the necessity of the purchase. Clinton, losing his patience, connects the project to the family's inability to afford any extras and, in a burst of anger, announces he is going out for a walk. Throughout the entire scene, Ruth is present, sitting at the table with her father, reading a newspaper; it is her way of rejecting what poverty is imposing on the family. A counterpoint of sorts to this scene occurs later in the film. Again, the scene is semi-comic and shot as a long take and is centred on the issue of money and spending. Clinton, under pressure because he thinks his job is in jeopardy and anxious about Ruth defying him regarding a theatre job interview, tells his wife, to shock and irritate her, about his spending thirty dollars many years ago on a Valentine's Day present for a woman in France. Clinton withholds the information that the present was nothing more than a 'thank you' gesture, given to a woman running a boarding house, until he has finished toying with Mrs. Jones' poorly disguised inquisitiveness about the situation. Ultimately, Clinton, in an attempt to get the money he needs to help Ruth financially, winds up quitting his job because of a fight with his employer over bonus pay. The result is that Clinton, not wanting to disappoint Ruth, offers to sell his spyglass to get the money he promised her. In a curious way, the experience of losing his job liberates Clinton; it allows him to let go of what he had valued most because it represented his independence, and acknowledge fully his love for and respect of his daughter.

Ruth, too, can be self-absorbed and single-minded. For example, although the young Fred Whitmarsh/Anthony Perkins is serious about Ruth, she doesn't share his vision of their future life together. In the film's most humorous sequence, which derives its humour from the lack of privacy in the Jones house, Fred, paying Ruth a late evening visit, attempts to court her in the parlour as the Joneses, upstairs, are heard getting ready for bed. Near the conclusion of the sequence, Fred invites Ruth to Harvard Class Day. Ruth, who is genuinely surprised and thrilled by the invitation, accepts but, as soon as Fred leaves, she gets out her letter from Hazel Dawn and begins to sing the words to 'The Pink Lady Waltz', the song that encapsulates her love affair with the stage. Ruth is flattered by Fred's attention but, later, she doesn't hesitate in turning down his proposal which is made just as she is about keep an appointment with John Craig, Hazel Dawn's director. In their final encounter, which takes place on the front porch of the Jones house, Ruth maintains her resolve that she must go to New York City immediately to pursue her theatrical career. While there is the suggestion that their parting is tentative, Ruth, after Fred leaves, enters the house and her face in a close shot reveals a sombreness that belies the girlish, slightly theatrical presence she conveys when with Fred. It is a reflective, intimate and private moment that provides the viewer with an aspect of Ruth not previously seen. In *The Actress*, Cukor tends to avoid making Ruth a strong viewer-identification figure; instead, he presents her and the film's other characters in a more objective light, undercutting the more sentimental aspects of the material.

Meet Me in St. Louis follows its credit sequence with a sepia still photograph of the Smiths' house that is transformed into a Technicolor motion picture image. *The Actress* has its credits imposed over a photo album that, at the credits' conclusion, is

opened. The photographs introduce not only the period and setting but also the film's principal characters, including Punk, the family cat, who persists in nibbling at Mrs. Jones' Boston fern despite being repeatedly told not to. (Punk, like the other family members, is strong-willed.) As the captions under the photographs indicate, the album is Ruth's but Cukor doesn't have her provide voice-over narration, a convention that would help establish viewer-identification. In *Actress*, it isn't a photograph of the Jones' house that is used to initiate narrative action; instead, it is a photograph of the Colonial Theatre which has been captioned "Where it all began!!". As the camera tracks towards the photograph, the image itself, which features the theatre marquee announcing 'Hazel Dawn, The Pink Lady', moves forward as a dissolve occurs introducing a long shot of Hazel Dawn/Kay Williams on stage performing a number. After a second long-shot of Hazel Dawn from a different perspective, there is a cut to a shot of the main floor audience and the camera then cranes up until it reaches the balcony area. Another cut and Ruth is seen, sitting amongst a crowd of enchanted viewers, intently watching the stage. Cukor cuts back to a long-shot of Hazel Dawn on stage but now as seen from the balcony. There next follows a series of cuts between Ruth and Hazel Dawn; the cuts back to Ruth featuring increasingly closer shots of her face, culminating in an extreme close-up as she mouths the words of 'The Pink Lady Waltz'. This image then dissolves to a close shot of Ruth humming the waltz to herself as she models a dress her mother (as the camera reveals as it tracks back) is presently sewing for her. *The Actress's* introductory sequence is remarkably elaborate and its intimacy and emotional intensity isn't matched at any point later in the film. It is the film's most privileged moment and its function is, in effect, to define Ruth. Cukor shoots it in the manner of a love scene that is what it is for Ruth, who gives herself completely to the seductive power of the stage and performance. Again, Cukor's strategies in introducing Ruth work against the stereotyping of the character and the viewer's expectations regarding what is about to be seen and experienced.

According to Emanuel Levy², MGM wanted Debbie Reynolds to play the part of Ruth and Cukor seriously considered the casting before deciding against it. Arguably, Reynolds would have been an unfortunate choice; her 1950s spunky, girl-next-door persona would have reduced the character to a bland, conventional creation. In contrast, Jean Simmons, despite the British accent which some critics claim is a big problem, was ideal for the role. Critics have also said that Simmons is too beautiful to play Ruth Gordon. The argument seems to be that Gordon's fierce desire to have a theatrical career was motivated in part by her realization that she wasn't physically attractive. While the notion itself is questionable, there is no reason to treat the film as if it is claiming to be a documentary-like reconstruction of Gordon at seventeen. In *The Actress*, Simmons ably communicates the underlying passion that drives Ruth to get to New York City and experience firsthand what it feels like to be in the profession. Simmons can project an outward image of innocence and youthful energy while conveying the potential of having a darker, more ruthless side. Interestingly, *The Actress* was released in 1953, the same year Simmons appeared in Otto Preminger's masterpiece, *Angel Face*. Despite their generic and thematic differences, the Simmons characters in the two films share a number of personality traits. For instance, Ruth, like Simmons's Diane in *Angel Face*, can be self-centred and persistent in getting what she wants; additionally, neither

Ruth nor Diane is the stereotypical ingenue, playing coy and/or petulant. And particularly after confronting her father about her desire to be an actress, Ruth becomes increasingly forceful in defending herself, growing in stature because of her willingness to fight back and reject compromise.

The casting of Spencer Tracy in the Clinton Jones role was equally inspired. The film marks the fifth and final collaboration between the actor and director. *The Actress* was the second Cukor film in which Tracy played a father figure; in the first, *Edward My Son*, Tracy's identity as a father is seen in an almost totally negative light. It is his obsession in indulging and controlling his son that ultimately contributes to the young man's destruction. *The Actress* provides Tracy with a role that is much more in keeping with his popular screen image: he is an American individualist who can be tough and stubborn but he can also be a man of sensitivity and compassion. Late in the film, after Clinton has agreed to help Ruth realize her ambition, he tells her and his wife about his own childhood and how it shaped his thinking. The story is centred on his mother who committed suicide when he was very young because she didn't have any means economically to sustain herself and a child when her husband abandoned her. Clinton's story not only reflects on his own present day existence but it also makes understandable his initial insistence that Ruth get an education in a field which will guarantee her an income. The film reveals Clinton to be, despite his intimidating exterior, a caring man who doesn't want his daughter to experience what he (or his mother) has been through. Tracy makes Clinton a vulnerable person without sentimentalizing either the character or the circumstances under which the revelation is made to his family. Although Tracy receives top billing, he is working as a character actor in *The Actress* as is Teresa Wright. Tracy and Wright have a great rapport and their teamwork in its own way rivals that of Tracy's collaborations with Katharine Hepburn. (According to Gene D. Phillips³, Hepburn considered playing the role of Mrs. Jones. While the characterization would have been a departure for Hepburn, it was decided that her presence in the film would have evoked the other Tracy-Hepburn pairings, causing a distraction.)

MGM wasn't happy with Cukor's completed version of *The Actress* and the studio, according to Cukor⁴ and others, tampered with it, hoping to make the film more commercially viable. MGM thought the film moved too slowly and trimmed it but, additionally, the studio felt that Simmons's Ruth wasn't sufficiently appealing. It appears that the studio's cuts were fairly extensive. For instance, an actor named Ian Wolfe, who plays a character named 'Mr. Bagley' according to numerous cast lists, is billed after Anthony Perkins in the film's opening credits; yet, as far as I can tell, the actor and his character aren't in the film. Other examples of cutting are evident in an occasional lack of narrative continuity. Early in the film, Ruth insists that they have a telephone, with Clinton flatly rejecting the notion; later, a telephone has been installed and Clinton, in a comic scene, is attempting to adjust to using it. Given the emphasis on both the family's tight economic situation and Clinton's resistance, it seems likely that the decision to get a telephone and its installation must initially have been a part of the narrative. Cukor claims that studio interference did substantial damage to *The Actress*, although the film retains enough of the caustic energy and edginess Cukor and Gordon gave it to make *The Actress* recognizably theirs. After attempting to 'salvage' the film through making adjustments, the studio became increasingly uneasy about the film's commercial

prospects and wrote it off as a box office failure before even releasing it. Unfortunately, the film failed commercially, reinforcing the studio's predication.

Cukor, in a number of interviews, claims that the interior of the Jones house as seen in the film was modeled on the actual Jones house Ruth Gordon's parents owned in Wollaston, Massachusetts. In addition to the attention paid to the set design and period detail, the film is beautifully lit and photographed by Harold Rosson. Rosson's lighting functions expressively to reinforce for the viewer the two areas of Ruth's emotional and physical being, with the film's opening sequence lit 'theatrically' and the scenes taking place within the Jones house lit 'naturalistically'. Also, although most of the film is shot on studio-built interior sets, on-location footage contributes nicely to an atmospheric creation of the characters' existence is a small New England town. With the exception of Anthony Perkins, who made his film debut in *The Actress*, Cukor was working with seasoned screen actors, which allowed him to do long takes. These long take shots, such as the scene in which Clinton tells Ruth and his wife about his childhood, aren't staged and/or played as 'big' scenes. Instead, Cukor's mise-en-scene is in the service of his actors and their dialogue. It is only on close inspection that Cukor's thoughtful and intelligent staging of such scenes becomes evident. These long takes are graceful on a visual level and concise in communicating the dramatic and/or comic content of the material.

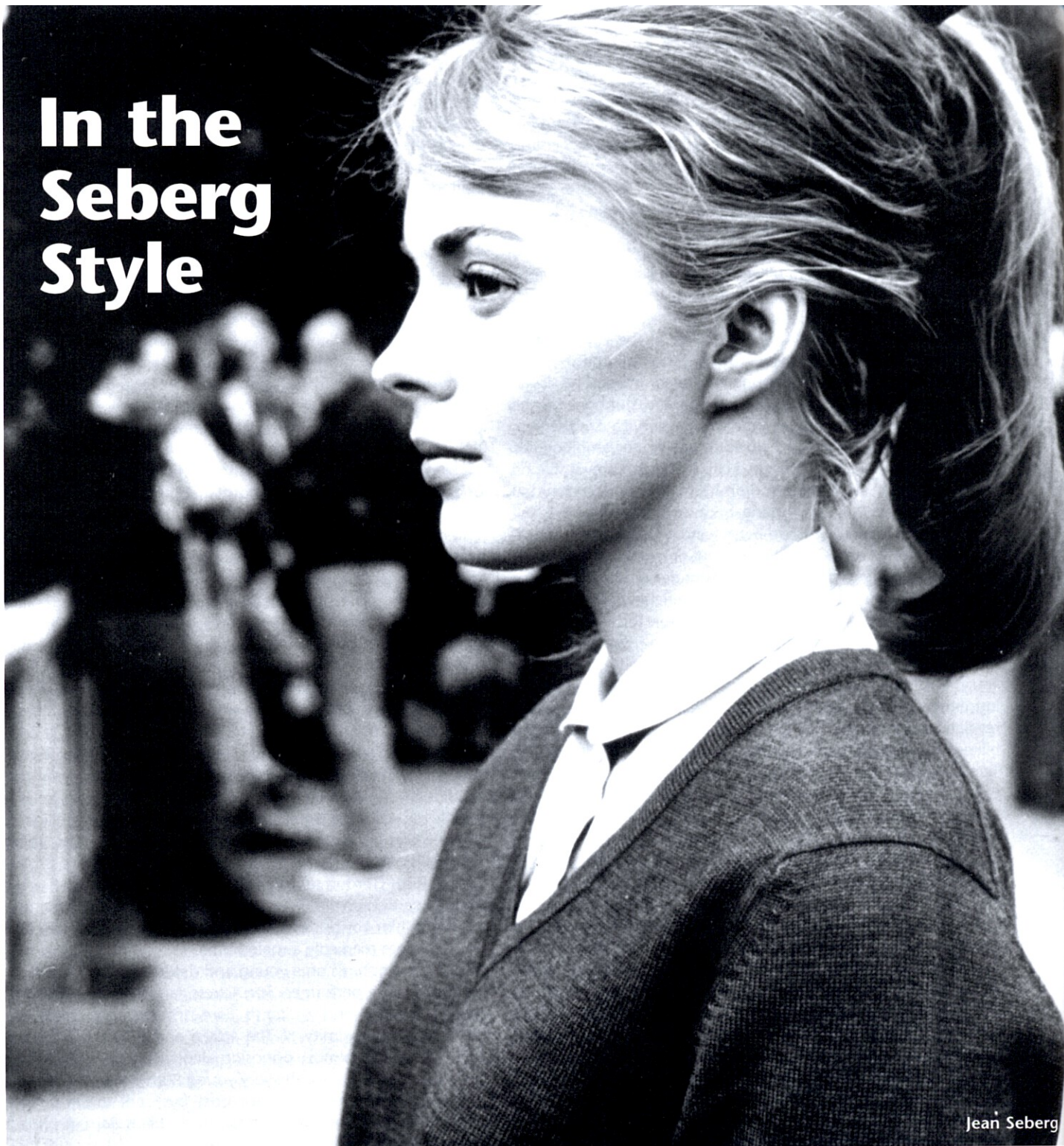
Since *The Actress* was Cukor's final collaboration with Ruth Gordon, it seems fitting that the project was so personal to her. The film is charming and it is so without being sentimental and clichéd in the treatment of its characters and their lives. It conveys a great deal of affection and does so in part no doubt because Cukor himself responded strongly to the material and the actors. *The Actress*, as Gavin Lambert points out⁵, relates directly back to *Little Women*. In both films, there are intelligent, sensitive and generous depictions of New England. Also, there are parallels in the respective personalities and creative aspirations of Ruth Gordon Jones and Katharine Hepburn's Jo March. While *Little Women* and *The Actress* share an episodic structure, the earlier film concludes with a stronger sense of closure and it also is more markedly a melodrama.

With its emphasis on a young and determined woman seeking success as a performer, *The Actress* can be aligned to *What Price Hollywood?* and *A Star Is Born*. Interestingly, given the chronological proximity of *The Actress* and *A Star Is Born*, the two films reflect almost opposing depictions of heterosexual romance. In *The Actress*, the very young Ruth doesn't allow herself to be distracted from her goal by Fred and his naive attempts to court her. In contrast, in *A Star Is Born*, a project that relies much more on the conventions of the melodrama, Esther Blodgett's romantic involvement with Norman Maine almost consumes her identity and threatens to abort her career. Nevertheless *A Star Is Born* is a wonderful companion piece to *The Actress*, despite the seemingly diverse scale and aesthetics of these two projects.

Notes

- 1 Andrew Britton, 'Meet Me in St. Louis: Smith, or the Ambiguities', *CineAction* no. 35 (1994), pp. 29 - 41.
- 2 Emanuel Levy, *George Cukor: Master of Elegance* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), p. 210.
- 3 Gene D. Phillips,
- 4 Gavin Lambert, *On Cukor* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), p. 213.
- 5 Ibid., p. 77.

In the Seberg Style



Jean Seberg

By ARTHUR NOLLETTI, JR.

Previously unavailable on any format, *In the French Style* (1963) was released on Columbia/Sony DVD in September 2011, but, alas, without a single extra feature. Made for \$557,000, the film returned a small profit and earned generally good notices, but was quickly forgotten. Directed by Robert Parrish and written by Irwin Shaw for their Casanna Production Company, it yokes together two of Shaw's short stories: "A Year to Learn the Language" and "In the French Style." The former provides the basis for the first half of the film; the latter, the second half. Essentially a coming-of-age story, the film has to do with Christina James (Jean Seberg), a 19-year old Midwesterner who comes to Paris for a year to study art and learn the language, only to get caught up in the jaded social scene. Staying on for three more years, she abandons her painting, does some modeling, and embarks on a series of love affairs before finally deciding to return home.

Appearing in nearly every scene, Jean Seberg is the main reason to see the film. Settling in Paris after her

two films with Preminger flopped, she famously rode the crest of the New Wave in Godard's *Breathless* (1959) and de Broca's sophisticated comedy *The Five-Day Lover* (1961). In fact, between 1958 and 1963, she practically owned the role of the American girl abroad. *In the French Style* marks the culmination of this period in her career, and showcases one of her most affecting performances.

Contemporary critics by and large regarded *In the French Style* as ambitious but uneven, preferring the first half, which they found fresh and original. Gently comic in tone, it concentrates on Christina's romance with a charming, if opinionated French student (Philippe Forquet), and concludes with a nicely observed scene in which the two go to a hotel to make love for the first time. Unfortunately, things go wrong from the start. Their room turns out to be ice cold; the champagne they order, lukewarm. On top of that, Guy, the young man, hasn't brought along enough money. As he and Christina lie in bed, he berates himself for having bungled everything and makes a startling confession: he is not a 21-year old engineering student, as he had led her to believe, but a 16-year old lyceum (high school) student. With this admission, the mood of the scene darkens. "How could I have been so inaccurate?" Christina says ruefully, having been taken in completely. Confused and hurt, she asks him why he lied. "Because you wouldn't have looked at me otherwise," he replies. Knowing this to be true, she cannot find it in her heart to be angry or turn him away. Following their lovemaking, Guy lies asleep by her side. However, she remains awake. Her eyes filled with tears, she knows their relationship is over.

What makes the film's first half especially engaging is Seberg and Forquet's playing off each other—Guy's mixture of pomposity and charm is perfectly matched by Christina's mixture of decency, determination, and naiveté. It is no coincidence that her last name is James, for she is the 20th century counterpart to Henry James' Daisy Miller: the proverbial innocent abroad who finds her values sorely tested. Thus, when Guy, in an angry snit, accuses her of caring only about her career and predicts that she will use sex to advance it, she fires back that she could have stayed in the States if it was sex she was after. And when in the hotel scene, he announces that the girl always undresses first, she declares emphatically, "Not this girl." As Christina soon discovers, Paris is not just a place but an education, in which one learns more about life, love, and oneself.

This education comes at a price, however: the loss of innocence. Indeed, in the film's second half, which opens with a rather awkward transitional sequence, we meet Christina three years later. Now the "smashingest girl in town" and breathtakingly beautiful, she is at her *soigné* best, having replaced her earlier smock and pony tail with chic evening wear and a stylish hairdo. Far more poised and sophisticated than before, she also is more guarded, keeping her emotions in check and hiding her real feelings beneath a well-cultivated surface. As critics have rightly complained, this section of the film treads on familiar ground, but it gives Seberg the chance to deepen Christina's characterization, plus it sustains a mood of melancholy and loss.

In this regard two scenes stand out: Christina's heart-to-heart talk with her father (Addison Powell), who is visiting from Chicago, and her breaking off an affair with foreign correspondent Walter Beddoes (Stanley Baker). In the former scene Christina and her father have a frank discussion about the life she is leading. According to Seberg, this was a scene she had played repeatedly with her parents back in Iowa. In the scene Christina is taken aback when her father suddenly asks how many men at

the party they've just attended have been her lovers. Unfailingly honest, she answers, "A couple," fully expecting his disapproval. However, far from lecturing her or throwing up his hands in horror, he explains that he knows enough about life to realize that a woman Christina's age may have taken two or three lovers in as many years. He then goes on to say that his only concerns are her welfare, her happiness, and her hope for the future. Finally, he tells her that he is proud of her for trying to make a life in Paris, but that it is time to return home. She listens respectfully, but is too much in love with Beddoes to heed his advice. He accepts her decision, albeit reluctantly, and the conversation comes to a close. Interestingly, Irwin Shaw had misgivings about his writing of the scene. Would an American father and daughter in the 1960s have talked so candidly about her life? he wondered. In fact, he needn't have worried, for not only is the writing insightful, but Seberg and Powell bring to the scene impressive feeling and conviction.

In the latter scene Christina meets with Beddoes for the last time to tell him she is moving on with her life. By now she has accepted the fact that he loves her less than she loves him, and that their relationship has no future. In this scene, all the hurt and pain she has suffered, all of the feelings she has suppressed, come to the fore. It is Seberg's most moving moment in the film.

Prior to this scene Christina has come to the realization that she has only two options available to her: remain "an emotional transient," or go back home and marry. Now, as she sits across from Beddoes at small restaurant table, her appearance—she has returned her hair to its natural color—and her rejection of alcohol in favor of tea and lemon make clear her choice. Unwilling to accept her choice, Beddoes pleads with her to come away with him, but she refuses, explaining that she loves her fiancé and he loves her—and that she no longer lives for the moment. However, she willingly admits that she is tempted by Beddoes's offer. It is a poignant admission, and we cannot help but wonder if by marrying she is denying a vital part of herself. For this reason alone the scene is imbued with a sense of melancholy and loss.

Indeed, seen today, this scene feels even more bittersweet and melancholic than it did in 1963, the year the film was released. For Christina's options are really no options at all. Quite the contrary, they provide an apt illustration of the pressures placed on American women after WWII, who yearned for more freedom, but had precious little way to attain it. Stated differently, the Christinas of the world were unable to take advantage of the dialogue that Betty Friedan initiated in her landmark book *The Feminine Mystique*, which came out in the same year as *In the French Style*. This dialogue, which continued in other groundbreaking feminist works that followed, urged women to become financially and emotionally independent in order to break out of their limited roles in society. Put simply, even as Christina was bidding farewell to Beddoes and embracing a new life as a surgeon's wife, the world around her was changing. This was the world that explicitly feminist texts and films of the 70s like Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* and Weill's *Girlfriends* would examine.

In the last shot we see of her, Christina is motionless and framed through a window, as she watches Beddoes disappear from view. That she has regrets about a lost love is only natural. For 21st century viewers, however, this image of Christina is not just about lost love or lingering regrets. It is about a woman at the crossroads in history. It is an evocative image, and along with Jean Seberg's sensitive performance, provides another reason for giving *In the French Style* a second look.

TCM Classic Film Festival

HOLLYWOOD 2012

By RICHARD LIPPE

The third annual TCM Classic Film Festival was held from April 12th to April 15th. The location was Hollywood Blvd. with the historic Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel serving as TCM's home base. In close proximity are the equally historic Grauman's Chinese and Egyptian theatres at which most of the festival's screenings took place. Despite more recent renovations, including several new buildings and up scale stores, this section of the boulevard retains some of the tackiness it had in the 80s. There are numerous souvenir stores selling sweat and T shirts, postcards and such, and fast food eateries. On a daily basis there is a flow of tourists who are occasionally entertained by paid performers who parade up and down the street dressed in costumes such as that of The Joker or Luke Skywalker. Considering the meagreness of what is being offered, it isn't surprising that no one looks engaged with their surroundings. At first glance, the overall effect is depressing but, on reflection, it serves as a reminder that the cinema's roots are in show business at its most basic.

While I have been to Hollywood previously, this was the first time I attended TCM's Classic Film Festival. My chief reason for going was that Kim Novak had been invited as the guest of honour, to receive recognition for her contribution to the cinema. There was a screening of *Vertigo* at Grauman's Chinese (the screening was sold out, filling the theatre's 1,100 seats), and on the following day, an official handprint ceremony took place in the theatre's courtyard. In addition, Novak was interviewed by Robert Osborne before a live audience of three hundred fans at the Avalon Hollywood theatre.

Obviously, there were other events happening at the festival that deserved attention. The 2012 Festival was themed "Style in the Movies" with 10 programming themes. For instance, one of the programs was "The Legendary Costumes of Travis Banton" which highlighted his work with 35mm print screenings of *I'm No Angel*, *The Scarlet Empress*, *Cleopatra* (1934) and *Cover Girl*. (The print screened of *The Scarlet Empress*, courtesy of the UCLA Film and Television Archive, was great, the best looking print of the film that I have ever seen.) Preceding the screening of *Cleopatra*, costume designer and historian Deborah Nadoolman Landis and costume designer Bob Mackie were present to offer commentary on the significance of Banton's contribution to the glamour associated with the Paramount studio of the 30s. Another of the style-themed offerings was "The Noir Style" that featured screenings *Raw Deal*, *Criss Cross*, *Gun Crazy*, *Night and the City* and

Cry Danger. Marsha Hunt (*Raw Deal*), Peggy Cummins (*Gun Crazy*), and Rhonda Fleming (*Cry Danger*) joined film noir expert Eddie Muller to introduce their respective films. Also, there was a program entitled "Built by Design: Architecture in Film", a thought provoking topic that looked at how architecture reflects 'popular culture and style' with *Trouble in Paradise*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* and *The Fountainhead* being screened to illustrate a range of approaches that can be taken towards the subject.

Using the umbrella of its style theme, the Festival celebrated the 100th anniversary of both Paramount and Universal studios;



the former with "The Paramount Renaissance", which spotlighted works produced by Robert Evans during his tenure as Head of Production in the 70s and, later, as an independent producer for the studio; as for the latter, the "Universal's Legacy of Horror," concentrated on the studio's 30s cycle of horror films beginning with *Dracula* (1931).

There were two films screened during the course of the Festival that I was particularly pleased to see. The first was a 35mm print of *The Macomber Affair* (1947) which was shown in a collection of films labelled "Discoveries" (the films has been out of circulation for many years) and the second a 35mm CinemaScope print of *Bonjour Tristesse*. The film was screened as an addition to the costume designer program which also included *Auntie Mame*. What I have listed here and in the above two paragraphs gives an indication of the wide range of options the festivalgoer had over a four day period.

As befitting a film festival taking place in Hollywood, it provided glamour with the participation of numerous stars; in addition to Kim Novak, Liza Minnelli, Kirk Douglas, Shirley Jones, Debbie Reynolds, Robert Wagner and Angie Dickinson were present to introduce a film(s) which has a significant place in their respective careers.

As for Kim Novak, the celebratory occasion was worth the trip. I was fortunate in not only being able to attend the taping of the interview conducted by Robert Osborne but also in managing to get an audience seat in the front row. Ms. Novak was in good spirits through out the two hour taping despite having to deal with a nasal condition. Osborne, as his numerous interviews screened on TCM have shown, is trusted by his interviewees given his longstanding connection to the film industry. He produced an environment that encouraged Novak to be open about her thoughts and feelings. The interview, which was telecast last March on TCM, lead to emotionally charged moments as she discussed aspects of her personal and professional life that continue to deeply affect her. She spoke of her father's bi-polar condition which wasn't diagnosed as such for many years and of her own which similarly wasn't detected until later in her life. On a professional level, she talked candidly about working with Mike Figgis on *Liebestraum* (1991), her last film to date, and how a lack of communication between them lead to her being unable to continue a filmmaking career.

TCM's tribute to Kim Novak was a gratifying experience as her contribution to the cinema has been so long undervalued. Beginning with *Pushover*, her screen debut, her distinctive screen presence and persona, and talent were evident. For *Vertigo* to become the tragedy that it is, the film must have an actor who convincingly embodies both the mysterious and compelling Madeleine and the very human Judy. Without Novak's performance, Scottie's obsession with her character and his descent into self-destruction would be a less devastating experience than it is. Just as the overwhelming feeling of loss *Vertigo* evokes at its conclusion is attributable to the death of Madeleine/Judy.

In comparison to TIFF, Toronto's high powered festival that screens several hundred new films annually and caters to both the general public and the

film distribution side of the industry, the TCM Film Festival seemed like an intimate and low-keyed event with about 1,000 people attending. According to the press staff and former attendees, the Festival has grown in numbers each year. If it continues to do so, more screening rooms will be needed. The three theatres that comprise The Chinese Multiplex are small and they had to make due for most of screenings. Given that TCM tends to concentrate on classical era films, it isn't surprising that the many of people attending were mature adults although an age range was evident.

In the elegant catalogue commemorating the 2012 Festival, Robert Osborne, in his introduction, refers to TCM's viewers as family in the sense that it is a love of the classical cinema that unites TCM and its viewers. The term 'family' may be somewhat too intimate and emotionally complex for that kind of bond to exit. Yet it isn't exactly inappropriate. As I discovered, the Classic Film Festival is a great place to visit and enjoy the pleasurable experience of viewing wonderful films in an environment that is both welcoming and somehow feels familiar.



Cleopatra

De Palma's Vertigo

FEMININITY AND FORMAL DESIGN IN OBSESSION

By DAVID GREVEN

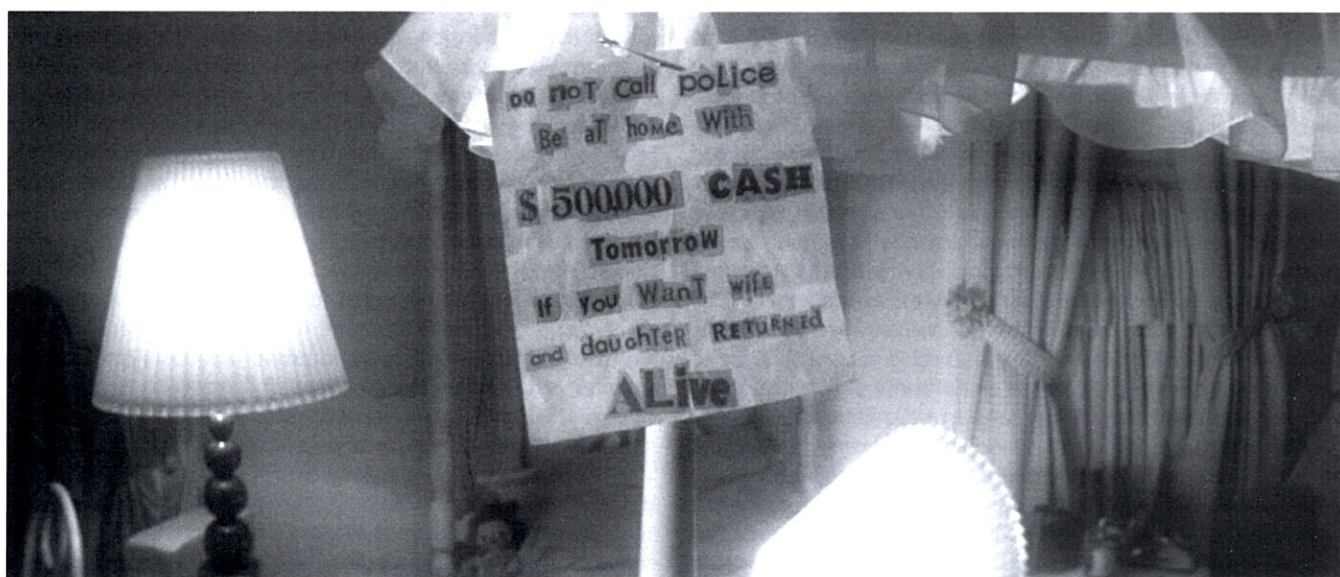
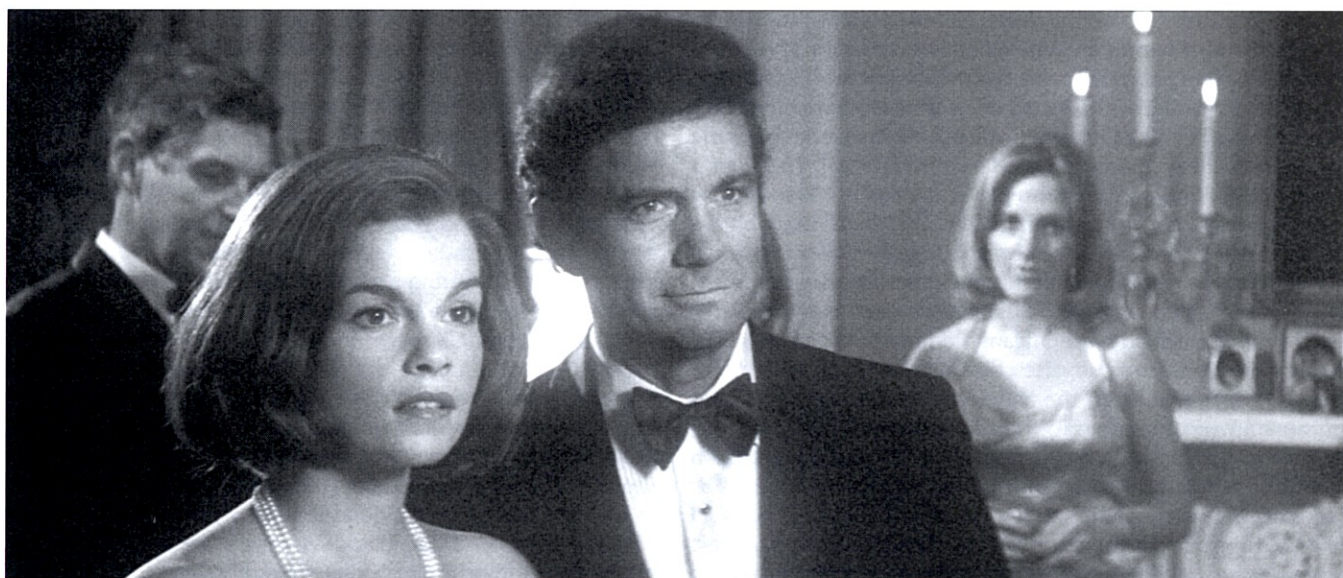
Though very different kinds of critics have championed the work of the enduringly controversial director Brian De Palma—Robin Wood, Pauline Kael, Kenneth MacKinnon, Armond White, and, most recently, Eyal Peretz and Chris Dumas—much of De Palma's work still awaits sustained, careful reconsideration.¹ *Obsession* (1976) has never been terribly popular even with enthusiastic De Palma fans, who would appear to share Pauline Kael's view of it a failure, though Robin Wood does speak of the film with admiration in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. As I will endeavor to show, the film, far from being a failure or a negligible work, is one of De Palma's finest. It is also a significant contribution from another important auteur from the New Hollywood period (though his directorial significance would emerge more prominently in subsequent decades), Paul Schrader, who wrote the screenplay.² The tendency in appreciative De Palma criticism ranging from Kael to Peretz and Dumas is to downplay De Palma's ties to Hitchcock's work. I suggest that, in order to appreciate De Palma's achievement in his Hitchcockian homages, a series of films that began with *Sisters* (1973) concluded with *Body Double* (1984), and then was taken up again with *Raising Cain* (1992) and *Femme Fatale* (2002), we do the opposite.

The most high-art-conscious of his films, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) resonantly evokes a specific kind of American history through its San Francisco setting, which signifies both contemporary American life of the 1950s and the American historical past, figured in the backstory of Madeleine Elster's (Kim Novak) mad ancestor Carlotta Valdes—partly real, partly made up by the villain, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) to seduce Scotty Ferguson (James Stewart), a retired detective, into investigating his wife Madeleine during her equally "mad" sojourns throughout the city. The "Carlotta" narrative includes both visual art representations of Carlotta ("Portrait of Carlotta," which Madeleine Elster stares at, fixatedly, as Scotty, equally fixated, stares at her) and strange, nightmarish images of Carlotta herself (in Scotty's nightmare after he believes that Madeleine has, Carlotta-like, killed herself). It is significant, I think, that *Obsession* substitutes Pontchartrain, New Orleans for San Francisco. Through its hyper-Southern associations, New Orleans stands in not only for the South but also for the histor-

ical American past as framed by both slavery and the romanticized customs of the "Old South" that worked to obscure its horrors.

Vertigo famously teems with references to high culture (the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, Tristan und Isolde, *Hamlet*). *Obsession* develops a distinctive repertoire of aesthetic associations. A significant portion of the film is set in Italy, called by one character "the birthplace of Western art." Prominent references are made to the early Renaissance Italian poet Dante (his definitive works featuring the character of Beatrice, especially *La Vita Nuova* and *Paradiso*, the third book of *The Divine Comedy*) and Dante's contemporary, the artist Bernardo Daddi, whose altarpiece painting of a Madonna and Child is located within the church in Florence that the protagonist, Michael Courtland (Cliff Robertson), first met his wife, Elizabeth (Geneviève Bujold), during World War II. The Church used in the film (San Miniato, which looms high over the city and above a long flight of steps) emerges as an overpowering visual, architectural, and cultural symbol. One of the most interesting aspects of De Palma's reworkings of the Hitchcock text are their own overlaps with classical (especially Euripides and Seneca) and Shakespearean tragedy as well as myth. One of De Palma's early films, *Dionysius in '69* (1970) indicates his interest in the tragic, sustained throughout his work. Given the film's ambivalent thematization of incestuous desire—the ardent love between Courtland and a woman who actually turns out to be his daughter—one immediately thinks of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*; Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex and his development of the *female* Oedipus complex, and the incest narrative of Myrrha in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The film proper begins in New Orleans, 1959, during Courtland and Elizabeth's gala ten-year anniversary party. On the very eve in which his marriage as well as business accomplishments are celebrated, Courtland's wife Elizabeth and their young daughter Amy are kidnapped and held for a high ransom. After a botched rescue attempt coordinated by the New Orleans police, Elizabeth and, it appears, Amy are killed. Crucially, Courtland follows the advice of the police chief not to give the kidnappers real money, and when the kidnappers discover his ruse, they thrust the fake money in the young Amy's



face, saying that her wealthy daddy did not love her enough to come up with the money. When Courtland, now in the 1970s and on a business trip to Florence with his business partner, Bob La Salle (John Lithgow), visits the same church where he met his now dead wife Elizabeth, he finds a woman working in the church who bears an uncanny resemblance to her. This young Florentine woman, Sandra (also played by Bujold), works inside the church on the restoration of the Daddi painting of the Madonna and Child, which has partially peeled away to reveal a sketch for the painting, or perhaps another painting, beneath. It will be revealed that Sandra is actually the grown-up Amy, who did not perish in New Orleans along with her mother, but was sent to Florence to be raised by an Italian family by La Salle, who secretly engineered the kidnapping/ransom plot (or later became an accomplice in it; the precise details are a bit fuzzy, but his complicity and duplicity are not). But we will not learn her true identity or the nature of the pivotal events in the kidnapping until much later, after Courtland has fallen madly in love with her, taken her back to New Orleans, and attempted to marry her. La Salle and Sandra stage a second kidnapping attempt, and this time, Courtland does attempt to pay the ransom in full, but is tricked by La Salle and “loses” Sandra just as he had Amy. Sandra returns to Italy but, distraught over her role in the plot and her love for Courtland, attempts to kill herself. Courtland, who discovers the plot and kills La Salle, races to the airport to dispatch the duplicitous Sandra, but, just in the nick of time, discovers that she is really Amy, and, for her part, Amy discovers that this time, Daddy has really brought the money.

Obsession's opening credits sequence features stills of Courtland and Elizabeth, on the steps of the Church in Florence during World War II and in the first bloom of their love, appear, pause, and disappear, much as they would on a slide projector. These stills, being watched by the guests at the anniversary party, are interspersed with the information in the credits and form a kind of montage sequence that evokes the home movie scene in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), in which the bickering Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier) and second Mrs. de Winter (Joan Fontaine) watch their amateur film-record of their honeymoon, the images of their smiling, playful gaiety in sharp contrast to their current discord. “And they lived happily ever after,” a title card declares, in ominous summation, as the guests applaud.

In the party during which the film's narrative proper begins, the Southern LaSalle praises the Midwestern Courtland for his “energy and ambition” and hails him as the “cream of the New South”; somewhat taken aback or perhaps feeling some of his own regional pride, Courtland rejects LaSalle's description, calling himself instead, to some laughter amongst the guests, the “skim milk of the Middle West.” But Courtland goes on, after repeating the words “Energy. Ambition,” to express a hope that their business enterprise—which we learn later is “land development, real estate” (as Courtland tells Sandra in their first church conversation, noting that her restoration work is far more important than what he does)—will preserve the “graceful values of the Old South.” The disturbing hint in this line of a willful indifference to slavery as one of these old “graceful values” is just one of many discordances in the film's depiction of heterosexual masculinity, in Courtland especially. Though a Midwesterner, Courtland increasingly comes to seem a conservative idolater of a Southern slaveholding past; his romantic obsession with the dead women in his family, his wife especially, evokes one of the major authors to emerge from the Old

South, Edgar Allan Poe (a major influence on Hitchcock, as he often declared), whose works teem with women who return from the dead.

The images in the credits sequence suggest some of the brooding disturbances of the film to follow. For one thing, they would appear to be out of sequence. The first image of Courtland, stationed in Florence during the American Occupation of World War II, in his military garb including cap, and that of Elizabeth, in a small dark hat (perhaps a French artist's cap) and wearing a red dress, would seem to be taken at a later stage in their courtship, verging on marriage. The other stills, especially of Elizabeth, seem to be at an earlier moment, perhaps when Courtland did not yet know her, suggesting he was photographing her without her knowledge. In one such still, Elizabeth, wearing a beige jacket and a long black dress, sits inside the Church, holding a sketchpad. There is another shot of Courtland and Elizabeth having a meal in a restaurant to which he will later take Sandra. In all of these “before” shots of Sandra in her beige-black ensemble, including one that evokes the Gothic in which she makes her way down the long flight of outdoor stairs that lead up to the Church, she looks oddly pensive. Indeed, in this Gothic image of her descending the stairs, she looks like a somnambulist, blank, spookily remote. There is a still of the couple standing on one of the distinctive Florentine bridges on which Courtland will later follow Sandra. The final credit-image solidifies Courtland and Elizabeth as “the couple”: he sits behind her, embracing her; she is in the red dress and now wearing *his* cap, in an oddly gender-bending effect. Indeed, with his male military hat on, she evokes the image of the female Nazi prison guard or commandant. And he looks peculiarly dark-featured and Hitlerian behind her. Indeed, Courtland will be associated throughout the film with darkness—dark clothes, dark lighting, dark expressions. The image of Elizabeth in the red dress with his cap on seems to signify a loss of her virginal innocence and her transition to adult sexual womanhood. Her wearing of his hat suggests that she has been absorbed into the masculine, phallic authority that Courtland represents. The film will suggest, ever more resonantly, that Courtland takes away her agency as well as her earlier, young sketch-artist potentiality.

As noted by the scrawled words on the final still in the credit sequence, these images were captured in 1948; the film proper begins in 1959 in Pontchartrain, New Orleans, outside of Courtland's mansion on the night of the party and the kidnapping. This big party scene evokes that in *Notorious* (1946), as will the later scene in which Sandra explores the house and its hidden rooms evoke Ingrid Bergman's exploration of the Sebastian house and discovery the wine cellar. The nighttime atmosphere as we slowly move into the big, resplendent house is anticipatory and eerie, as is the slowed-down movement of the forward-tracking shot, which evokes Hitchcock but also crucially distends this effect, makes it more noticeable and also more dream-like. De Palma immerses us in the Hitchcock style, makes us *inhabit*, even luxuriate, in it. But this style is also the focus of critical inspection, a simultaneously pleasurable enlargement and skeptical analysis.

Once inside the mansion, we join the elegantly dressed but somewhat detached, pensive revelers. We are plunged not only into the realm of *Notorious* but also Hitchcock's 1934 *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (remade by him in 1956). The party scene in *Obsession* reproduces the atmosphere in that film of the dancing revelers in the evening at the Swiss ski resort right

before the bullet is fired through the window and into Louis Bernard's chest as he dances with the married heroine, whose daughter will soon be kidnapped.

Characteristically, De Palma takes the ominous Hitchcockian dance/party scene and slows it down, renders it more evanescent and dream-like, an effect greatly enhanced by Bernard Herrmann's swirling, pointedly grandiose romantic score. Only Courtland and Elizabeth dance, a detail that is easy to miss on a first viewing of the film. Their singular dancing, which engulfs the frame, emphasizes their narcissism and indifference to all of the other guests. This suggestion of their solipsism will emerge as a key detail to explain La Salle's anger at Courtland and perhaps Elizabeth as well.

As the couples at Courtland's celebration sip champagne and make chit-chat, the smiling butler carrying a tray of champagne walks right towards us (the camera remaining at waist-level), comes to a halt and, as if for our benefit alone, swivels so that we can see a gun tucked into his waist on the left side. It would appear that the butler is showing off his phallic protuberance to LaSalle, who then makes a toast. The presence of the gun and its threat of murderous violence infiltrates this scene (as it suddenly does in the party scene in the 1934 *Man Who Knew Too Much*) and lends it a macabre oppressiveness, one that extends into the toast, Courtland's abashed/arrogant response to it, and to the next shot of Courtland dancing with Elizabeth, the camera dancing around them.

The couple both dance with Amy as Courtland takes her into his arms, saying, "Let's bring in Mommy." But then Courtland breaks off from his wife to dance alone with Amy, held in his arms, subtly eclipsing Mommy, as registered by Elizabeth's/Bujold's expression. Already, the film suggests its ongoing interest in the father-daughter romance and its sexual implications while hinting at the mother's estrangement. Elizabeth, the wife and mother, remains silent throughout the film. As the camera romantically swirls around the dancing Courtland and Amy, the film establishes a crucial counter-narrative of female dissatisfaction. We are increasingly made to feel for Sandra and her longing for recognition both from her father and from her dead biological mother (her adoptive Italian mother also dies); indeed, she becomes an equal protagonist in the film, given her own narrative focus, especially through her growing obsession with Elizabeth and then the revelation of her involvement in the plot to bilk Courtland out of his money and her later guilt-ridden suffering over it.

This daughter-plot is a radical dimension of the film that opposes its masculinist narrative. But perhaps even more radical still is the "mother"-plot that casts Sandra's into relief. We are given an early glimpse of Elizabeth's deprivation, curiously sounded out by her silence and then given voice in her quoted letter. But even as she will be given voice, it is her daughter's accented voice that speaks her words. Even in sympathy, Elizabeth is denied her true voice, as opposed to the "Beth" of Schrader's original screenplay *Déjà Vu*, who does utter some nondescript lines of dialogue. (The casting of Bujold, born in Montreal, Quebec, and of French Canadian and Irish ancestry, is significant in this regard. Bujold, who plays the silent American Elizabeth and then the "Italian" Sandra, adds to the polyphony of women's voices in the film but also to the theme of their denial, since Bujold also can never speak in her "real" voice. Bujold's fierce, heartbreaking performance is central to the film.)

Interestingly, however, what Elizabeth is not denied is a sexual appetite. In the post-party scene between her and her hus-

band, her erotic appreciation for him is palpable. Indeed, we are, surprisingly, invited to share in it. It is Courtland's body that is eroticized—we see Cliff Robertson standing shirtless in the bedroom and then turning around to walk towards Elizabeth as she enters the room. He looks at her suggestively, but she is not nearly as eroticized a presence in this scene as Courtland/Robertson. She is, however, given the power to appraise her husband sexually. She looks down, with speculative eye, at what would appear to be his crotch. (He is also holding a black case of some kind, perhaps an album of photos, a fuzzy detail that may explain the downward direction of her gaze, but its intensity is unmistakably erotic.) They embrace, and we expect some kind of scene of lovemaking between them. But then Amy cries out, and Elizabeth goes to her room to attend to her, only to discover a pair of criminals, one holding the whimpering Amy, the other suddenly grabbing her mother. A ransom note, made up of various glued-together letters from newspapers, is affixed to the bedpost for Courtland to discover.

What follows is the development of one of the distinctively odd themes of this film: Courtland's inability to "come up with the money." The film mixes Freudian themes with a Marxian critique of white American hetero-masculinity. If Courtland represents a new capitalist world order ambiguously tied to both the New South and the Old South, to progressive and reactionary values at once, his money is also precisely the sign of his lack of masculine potency. He will be haunted by his inability to deliver the money to his wife and daughter's kidnappers. Having told La Salle to "call the police" once he receives further instructions from the kidnappers about where to drop off the ransom, Courtland is made to regret this decision with inexpressible sorrow, since both his wife and (it seems) his daughter die in the botched police rescue attempt, De Palma thoroughly continuing Hitchcock's characteristic legendary disdain for and distrust of the police and other forms of institutionalized authority. Later, during what is meant to seem like the second kidnapping, this time of his fiancée Sandra, Courtland hurls a suitcase full of what he *believes* to be his money, in a desperate attempt to right his previous wrong. As La Salle derisively notes as a distraught and disbelieving Sandra/Amy rifles through the suitcase once again full of blank pieces of paper, "Court just can't come up with the money. Not for Elizabeth, not for Amy, and not for you."

These associations of money and male orgasmic/phallic potency—"coming up" with the money—evoke the money-shot of pornographic film, in which the man climactically ejaculates on camera so that his sexual pleasure and satisfaction is made incontrovertibly visible and literal for the audience. It also recalls Freud's equation of money and excrement. Money, while tied to phallic power, signifies wasted potential and human waste. What is especially interesting, then, about this gendered economic typing, a symbolic and monetary currency at once, is the woman's obsession/investment in it. Sandra's obsession with Courtland's money evokes Marion Crane's theft of the \$40,000 in *Psycho* (1960); indeed, as if adjusting for inflation, La Salle gives her \$50,000 for her role in the plot.

The ostensible hero of this film, Courtland is quite an ambivalently rendered character. While the movie sympathetically evokes his pain over the death of his wife and daughter, it also frequently invites us to regard him skeptically. He is a dark, brooding, disturbing figure, and De Palma's treatment of him is characteristic of the director's critical disposition towards

American masculinity in his work generally. In my view, this is the most important political dimension of De Palma's work.

A telling example of the film's detached position toward Courtland is the brilliant pure-cinema sequence in which he makes the drop-off of the fake ransom money, as a French-accented detective urges him to do, during the first kidnapping. Herrmann's score charges the entire sequence with grandiloquent portentousness. As he journeys on the ferry the "Cotton Blossom" (which evokes images of the Old South), its huge red wheel churning in the water like the tragic gears of fate, Courtland, in dark sun-glasses and dark suit, macabrely tapping his wedding-ringed finger on the black suitcase full of blank paper, seems more like the villain, a coldly impassive hired assassin on his way to a hit. If the sequence can be read as a critique of normative masculinity, an entirely incongruous but also richly symbolic detail reinforces this critique. A troupe of Boy Scouts scamper aboard the Cotton Blossom as it departs. We pull back to see, from a distance, the stoic, impassive, opaque image of Courtland standing on the deck as the Scouts board the ship. Later, after Courtland has hurled the suitcase on the wooden planks of the drop-off point, we see only the ghostly shadows of the Scouts. Here is the payoff of the Boy Scout motif, an eerie dream-image of boyhood and lost promise, suggesting that adult masculinity derives from a corruption of a former state of innocence. Even stranger is the shot of Courtland after he has dropped off the money, standing alone in a passageway, dark sunglasses and dark suit intensifying his dark-haired appearance, as the brown waters beneath the ferry churn. Discordantly, this shot further conveys the sense that he is a dubious, even frightening figure, far from the sympathetic male lead on the verge of losing everything.

Once Elizabeth and, it seems, Amy have perished as a result of the botched kidnapping-rescue attempt, Courtland stands alone in the vast green landscape that will become the "Pontchartrain Memorial Park." In one of the most stunning sequences in the film, and one of De Palma's most stringent meditations on Hitchcockian themes, we watch a yellow crane uneasily place the heavy marble lid on the tomb of the dead wife and daughter. The tomb is a replica of the Church in Florence where Courtland met Elizabeth. Before Jean Baudrillard put forth his famous theory of the cultural significance of the simulacrum, De Palma was treating the same subject similarly. As a replica of the Church, the tomb—or is it really just an enormous tombstone?—is also a sacrilegious *objet d'art*, a mock-appropriation of a sacred site.

That Courtland can reproduce the Church in this manner speaks to his wealth and entitlement. That we see the tomb being constructed is, I think, crucial. We see this monument of memorialization being built, the symbol being erected. Once the lid is placed on the tomb, it becomes the tomb, at once the work of art and the hollow, lifeless replica (emblematic of the wastefulness of Courtland's wealth and life). The completed tomb-object stands virtually alone in the vast green field, like Wallace Stevens' jar on the hill. Starkly placed in its singular prominence in the field, the tomb is an arresting, alluring symbol. Courtland appears to be mesmerized by it for nearly two decades; Sandra will make her way towards it later like an entranced devotee. A vertiginous 360 degree pan—recalling the famous one in *Vertigo*—around Courtland, the field, the tomb, and back to him enacts, through cinematic means, the passage of time. We are now in "Pontchartrain Memorial Park, 1975," in land that has itself been converted into a kind

of tomb, sixteen years later in time.

With its beguiling force, the tomb is an endless goad to interpretation. Is it a symbol of memory, of capitalistic waste, or, recalling Poe, of the cultural entombment of women? Is it the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction? Is it De Palma's own artistic signature, the copyist's nod to the original? As has been noted, what De Palma characteristically adds is the note of satire. The tomb is an unwieldy nod to a great work of art, ridiculously diminutive in comparison to the Church. If Hitchcock is the cinematic Church, De Palma simultaneously genuflects before it and defaces it. But, somehow, De Palma's satire only deepens his more serious themes. If the entire sequence, symbolic and temporal, that shows us the building of the tomb and conveys us through time, nods to *Vertigo*, which is also a meditation on time (the past in every way infiltrating Scotty's present), it also somberly conveys its own messages about mortality, meaning, and meaninglessness. The message would appear to be that the monuments to memory human beings create far exceed human life-spans. This tomb will remain standing long after Courtland himself becomes a memory.

In Florence with La Salle on a business trip, Courtland finds himself the center of a homosocial enclave over which La Salle, like a grim court jester, presides. In a nighttime club, festooned with classical statues on which vivid, electric, Dario Argento-like colors cast a lurid light, Courtland, La Salle, and a group of Italian businessmen adorned with attractive young women sit around having drinks, providing another opportunity for De Palma to critique the homosocialization of male identity, which hinges on a male-group misogyny. "How do they get such young wives?" Courtland innocently asks of the older men, adorned with pretty young women. The men proceed proudly to show pictures of the matronly older women who are their actual wives, in an echo of the credit-sequence image of husband and wife (though Bujold in these shots is anything but matronly). The cultural standards that allow this shared exploitation of women—both the young mistresses on display and the women, pictured, at home—is held up to Courtland as an ominous, if humorous, mirror-image of his own male privilege.

I want to suggest that in La Salle, played by the impossibly tall and broad John Lithgow, in every way a physical contrast to the much smaller Cliff Robertson, De Palma explores the homoerotic dimensions of the homosocial. He also explores one of his major themes, that same-gender groups are breeding-grounds for duplicity, cruelty, and betrayal (this applies to the female world of *Carrie* as well). Just about every De Palma film involves these elements, especially betrayal. In La Salle, who secretly plots against Courtland, the theme of the betrayer in De Palma takes on an especially sustained, Iago-like edge. La Salle uses this social occasion among the Italian men as opportunity to vent about Courtland's lack of business/real-estate development and initiative, complaining jocularly but bitterly about the Pontchartrain Memorial Park as one giant tomb ("una tomba!"). La Salle would appear to be explaining how entombed he personally feels as Courtland's business partner, trapped inside his grief, even as La Salle has himself orchestrated this grief. Always physically contrasted—La Salle, tall and large, mustachioed, blond, in pastel or beige suits; Courtland dark-haired and darkly attired, smaller and more compact—these men form a visual allegory of not only contrasting male styles but also the impossibility of authentic male connections in patriarchy. Their physical contrasts sign their emotional incompatibility and unachievable psychic connections. Never

shown to be attached or to have any relationships of any kind, other than that with Courtland and his secretary, La Salle is one of the more readably queer personae in De Palma's work.

De Palma frequently casts Lithgow in roles that are either sexually perverse (*Blow Out*, 1981) or gender-bending (*Raising Cain*). Here, his La Salle serves as the embodiment of the horrors of capitalism (this petty villain obsesses over Courtland's money no less than Sandra does) while maintaining a perverse, or, better put, queer desire for the hero's masculinity. Homosexuality, like incest, is an erotic force that threatens to undermine male power and also to expose the vulnerability at its core. It is little wonder that De Palma evokes *Dial "M" for Murder* (1954) during the death-struggle between these men, evoking the oddly "homosexual" undercurrent in the scene between the husband Tony (Ray Milland) and Swann, whom he blackmails into (attempting) to murder his wife. A brightly shining pair of scissors sticks out of the dead La Salle's chest, evoking the attempted murder in *Dial "M,"* which concludes with Margot (Grace Kelly's) surprising murder of her would-be assassin.

The next day, Courtland claims that he wants to see more of the city and its art works, and in the very next scene La Salle takes him to the Church, asking if it isn't the very place where he met Elizabeth? Indeed it is, as La Salle well knows. Once Courtland enters the Church, he symbolically makes his way through the history of Italian-Christian Renaissance art and iconography, the forward tracking shot beautifully conveying the sense of a temporal and cultural tour. He walks past a saint's head/bust, illuminated by a lit halo and long, glowing candles; beautiful murals of the Passion; rows of pews filled with the devoutly penitent; and all the while, Herrmann's sacral music, punctuated by dirges, lends the entire atmosphere a reverent quality. Courtland then looks above and sees workmen; and for the first time, he sees Sandra, wearing a white lab-coat of sorts as she works on the restoration of the Bernardo Daddi Madonna. This image of Madonna and Child is another richly symbolic one, in ways both immediately obvious and subtle. The entire image of Madonna and Child evokes one of the core themes of the film, the Sandra-Amy/Elizabeth relationship. That the dialogue between Sandra and Courtland makes the question of whether or not to restore the Daddi an explicit motif lends itself to the larger thematic question of doubles and copies on which *Obsession's Vertigo*-like depends. A flood damaged the Daddi painting, which began to peel, revealing an older drawing underneath. As Sandra playfully asks Courtland, should the cruder original be recovered, or the finished painting be restored? He answers the latter, but it is a question that remains uneasily unanswered for the film itself. Clearly, De Palma and Schraeder—who claim to have created *Obsession* after a revival screening of *Vertigo* that they attended together—are using the Daddi painting as a symbolic canvas on which to depict their own meta-cinematic obsessions.

In one of the most resonant riffs on *Vertigo* in *Obsession*, Courtland follows Sandra as she leaves the Church and walks across one of the city's gorgeous, distinctive bridges, which look especially haunting at night, and then walks back over the bridge on her return. The theme of wandering that is such an explicit and memorable aspect of *Vertigo*, exemplifying and heightening its thematization of modern urban loneliness, becomes something more ominous still in *Obsession*. While James Stewart's Scotty is paid by Gavin Elster to follow Madeleine, he and Madeleine are also both self-identified "wanderers." ("Ah, but only one is a wanderer," Madeleine

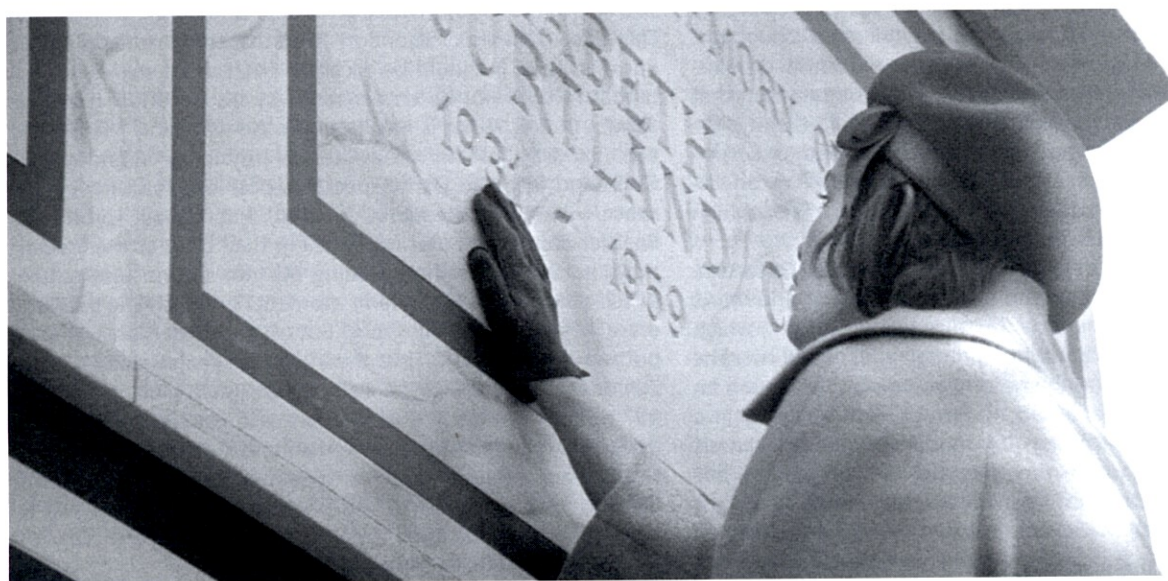
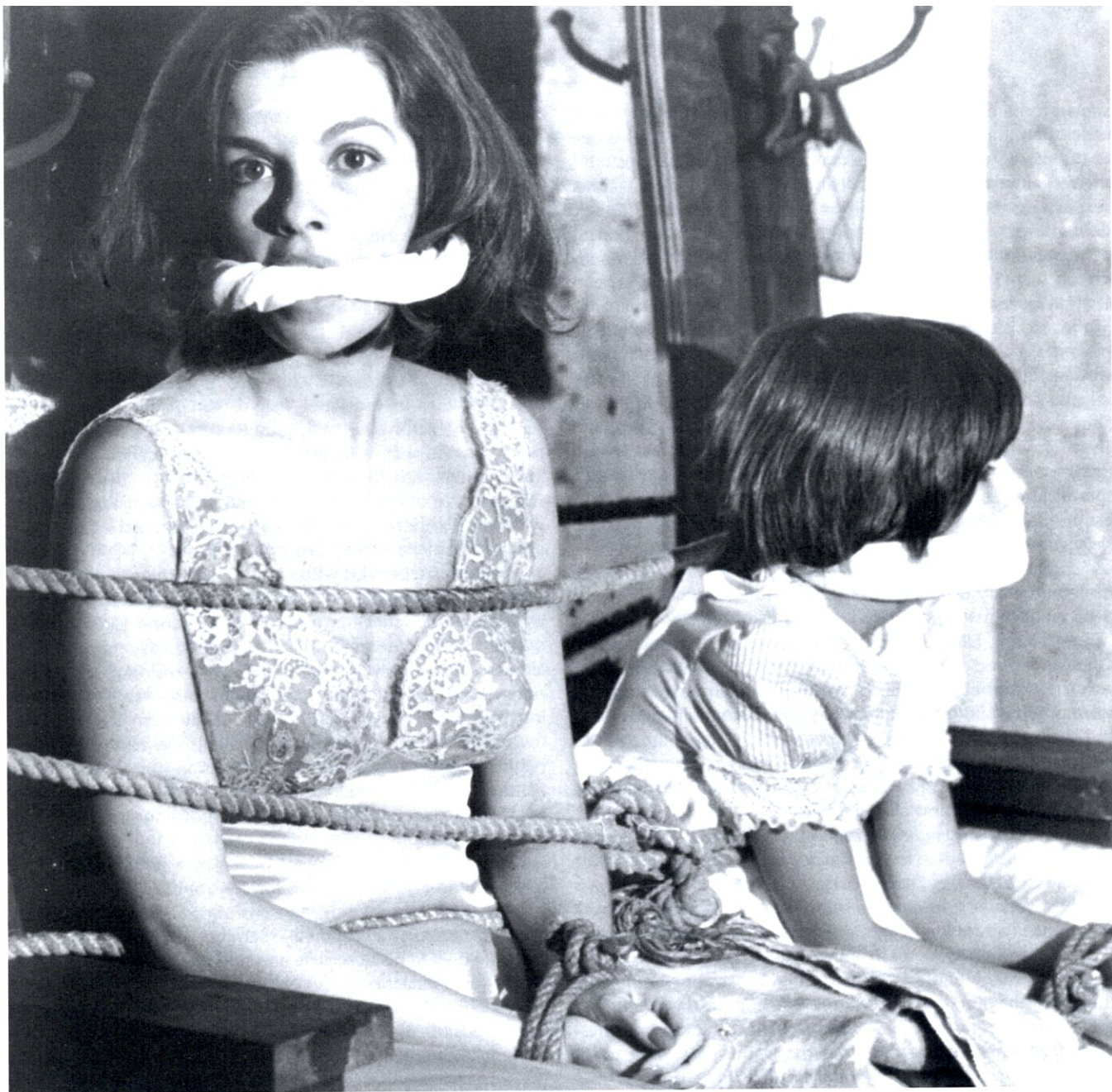
says, playfully, perhaps, to Scotty. "Two together are always going somewhere." Scotty responds, "I don't think that's necessarily true...") In *Obsession*, however, Courtland is clearly something more contemporary: a stalker. With his committed interest to the varieties of invasive looking, voyeurism especially, De Palma presciently predicted the rise of stalking as a particularly emphatic form of illicit looking and personal violation.

To compare Courtland to Scotty is to notice the deepening ambivalence towards the Hitchcock male protagonist that informs De Palma's work. I say "deepening" because, of course, that ambivalence is already very much present in Hitchcock. The audience is certainly encouraged to find Scotty a questionable character in the latter half of *Vertigo*, especially in the scenes in which he remakes Judy Barton into Madeleine, very much against her will. But in the initial scenes of Scotty's involvement with Madeleine, when he follows her in her car while driving in his, we are very much encouraged to identify with him, to become entranced by this simultaneously chilly and vulnerable, austerely beautiful woman.

Not so in *Obsession*—Courtland's determined following of Sandra is presented as increasingly suspect, tonally registered by the ominous shift from day to night during Sandra's walks on the bridges. As we illicitly and voyeuristically follow Sandra along with Courtland, we enter an oneiric realm of danger and potential violence. Identity itself comes to seem a literally fleeting phenomenon. As Sandra walks away from us, and back toward us, in the ever-darkening nighttime atmosphere, we begin to share in Courtland's obsession primarily because Sandra is the one recognizable figure in an urban scene of anonymity, disconnection, and an overpowering sense of timelessness and rootlessness.

Courtland wanders Florence driven by a simultaneous need to lose himself in fantasy and for control over the object that stimulates. In other words, he transforms Sandra into a monument to memory, a corporeal, roaming, female version of the tomb he built in his dead wife and daughter's honor, woman as replica, as simulacrum.

On an early romantic jaunt, during which Courtland has Sandra posing, as did Elizabeth, on the steps of the Church, the two make their way down a series of staircases behind an old building. As they descend, Sandra playfully—or mock-playfully—recounts the story Dante tells in his courtly love-classic *La Vita Nuova* (1295) of "The Lady of the Screen," the woman that Dante fixed his visual attention on so that the beautiful Beatrice Portinari (and it should be recalled that Sandra shares her last name) "would not be embarrassed by his continual gaze," as Sandra puts it. What is interesting is the way that, like a director, Sandra "blocks" the scene, physically maneuvering Courtland into the Dante-spectator position, marking off the space where the beautiful, desired, but visually prohibited Beatrice stood, and placing *herself* in the "Lady of the Screen" position. Sandra's self-positioning fits into a consistent pattern of self-abnegation in the film, moments in which she seems to erase herself, as I will show. But she also demonstrates an uncanny awareness of the theory of the male gaze (perhaps Schraeder, and perhaps De Palma, too, read Mulvey's famous 1975 Screen article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"?), establishing her awareness of the female subject position in relation to the gaze and to spectatorship. On some level, Sandra "owns" the gaze, yet it is also true that she will be shown to be subsumed by the gaze, and specifically the female—the mother's—gaze at that.



One extraordinary moment makes the implications of Sandra's agency for Courtland's male spectatorial power especially palpable. On a date at night, Courtland begins waxing nostalgic about Elizabeth, her beauty, and, especially, her "Bryn Mawr" walk. Part of what is powerful about this moment is the doubleness of it all, especially on a repeat viewing after the plot has been revealed. Courtland is telling a new romantic interest about his dead wife, but also telling his daughter about her mother; Sandra is simultaneously performing her role as Courtland's love interest and taking in knowledge about her mother. In a Svengali-esque gesture, Courtland attempts to teach Sandra how to emulate Elizabeth's Bryn Mawr walk, a kind of "glide." Sandra gaily walks up the stairs that lead to the Piazza della Signoria (Signoria Square). As Sandra walks up the stairs, Courtland walks behind her, following her movements and directing her. But as filmed, Courtland looks menacing, even murderous, a sinister, black-garbed figure we see from behind who looks like he is about to attack the woman he has been following.

What is crucial here is that Courtland attempts to transform the way that Sandra walks. If, as I have been suggesting, the woman's freedom of movement, signified by walking, is a metaphor for her surprising and troubling agency, Courtland's attempt to control and reprogram precisely the ambulatory aspects of her personality is complexly telling. The associations of Courtland and sinister vision will continue to inform the film's representation of him, informing as well his role as husband. When he and Sandra first arrive at his New Orleans mansion, and she, in a state of wonder, makes her way into the interior of her lavish new home, there is an unnerving long shot, from Sandra's POV, of Courtland at the front door. As he makes his way toward Sandra, his face is completely darkened, as is his figure; when he comes into view, he is brandishing an eerie, unsettling smile. Courtland continues the Gothic tradition of the sinister husband who provokes fear in the heroine (shades of *Rebecca*, *Suspicion*, and *Marnie*), but the film maintains this critical distance of him from the very start, even in the early sections in which he is at least ostensibly the pitiable, wronged victim along with his abducted wife and daughter.

In her voice-over interior monologue later in the film, Sandra explicitly confesses that she has sought to "revenge" her dead mother, signaling her active and willing participation in the plot against Courtland. From a feminist perspective, the most significant moment in *Vertigo* is, arguably, the one in which Scotty, our primary identification figure, leaves Judy's room and the film switches to her point of view. Through her perspective, we the viewers gain information to which Scotty is denied: the truth of the Gavin Elster plot, in which Judy pretended to be Madeleine so that Elster could murder his wife and Scotty could be the witness to what he believes to be the wife's suicide. If this shift in audience identification is most forcefully conveyed not only through the letter that Judy writes but also by her *ripping up of the letter*, a symbolic ripping apart of masculinist narrative, *Obsession* finds several equivalents for this surprising female agency, while adding something else: a woman's empathy for another woman's experience. Sandra, now engaged to be married to Courtland and living in his mansion, insists on entering the still-preserved room that belonged to her mother. She reads her mother's diary, which contains haunting passages about her growing dissatisfaction. Elizabeth wrote, "I wonder if Michael cares more for his business than he does for me," and Sandra gives voice to her mother's words. And later, her

\$50,000 pay-off in hand, Sandra attempts, while on the plane back to Rome, to write Courtland a letter explaining her involvement, desire to revenge her mother, and also her love—daughterly and romantic-sexual at once, it would appear—for her father-fiancé. *Obsession* brilliantly reimagines Judy's letter-writing and its indication of her own agency and desires—for in ripping up the letter, she is also making the conscious decision to pursue a relationship with Scotty, fraught with danger though it is—as Sandra's immersion in her mother's writing and experience and Sandra's own written and verbalized account of her own desires. De Palma's film recognizes the incipient feminist discourse in *Vertigo* and takes it further.

The frequent charge against De Palma in his Hitchcockian mode is that he "rips off" or "mishandles" Hitchcock, as Andrew Sarris most vehemently maintained.³ But De Palma neither rips off nor mishandles Hitchcock—he reinterprets and reimagines Hitchcock paradigms and derives new meanings from them. And these new meanings become new cinematic paradigms. As a case in point, the scene in Courtland's New Orleans home in which Sandra, his fiancée now—installed, much like the second Mrs. De Winter in *Rebecca*, as the mistress of a great man's house, presided over by the spirit of a dead woman—stares intently, in the vast living room, at the portrait of her mother and herself as a child brilliantly reformulates key themes and visual motifs in *Rebecca*, *Vertigo*, and, more subtly, *Psycho*, while very much continuing the central preoccupation in *Marnie* with the mother-daughter relationship. As Sandra stares at the portrait—which shows a seated Elizabeth, looking formal and somewhat imperious, and Amy seated (sprawled, really) at her feet—Bernard Herrmann's music strikes its most pensive notes, heightened by dirges and suffused with the lyrical "madness" theme. Through eyeline-match shots that, through the editing, grow more constricted and intense, Sandra's wide-eyed focus on the portrait becomes an ever-tightening focus on her mother's eyes. The scene of staring becomes a montage of pairs of eyes and intently returned gazes, Sandra's real-life eyes and Elizabeth's curiously knowing, impelling eyes in the portrait. Real-life eyes become subsumed by the eyes of representation; the daughter's eyes become both one with and subsumed by the dead mother's eyes; the dead mother's identity subsumes the living daughter's. All the while, this scene of intense looking is itself the subject of another woman's look—unseen, at the head of the room, Judy, the black woman who is a "lifelong member" of Courtland's house, as he introduces her, stares at Sandra as she stares at the portrait. If, as many have noted, black women, especially in the classical Hollywood era, functioned as a super-sign of the maternal, and if, in her kindness, Judy offers maternal warmth to Sandra, Judy functions here as a critical if not unsympathetic observer, our surrogate, watching Sandra with wonder and unease.

Crucially, what arrests and locks in Sandra's gaze is her mother's gaze, her eyes; Sandra demonstrates little interest in her own represented child-self, the figure of Amy also present in the portrait. Similarly, when Sandra visits the tomb erected in memory to both her mother and her child-self, she places her face against her mother's epitaph alone, connecting only to the portion of the stone in which the dedication to her mother's memory is inscribed and paying no attention to the memorial dedication to Amy Courtland. Sandra only has eyes for mother, and implicitly obliterates her own memory and identity.

The scene in which Sandra visits her mother's as well as her own grave is amongst the most somber and austere in the De

Palma canon. As Sandra makes her way to the tomb, she appears obsessively, helplessly drawn not just to her mother's (and her own child-self's) memory but also to the hypnotic power of art. The replica of the Church is also itself a work of art, impelling Sandra to action as it compels her to pay it homage. The tomb is analogous to the mother-daughter painting in this regard, and together, both art-objects embody the power of visual art to arrest and mesmerize the spectator. Moreover, as galvanizing art-objects they pulse with the power of the mother's uncanny, hypnotic gaze.

Sandra's mesmerized engulfment by the maternally-charged art-object recalls the moments in which Madeleine Elster, seated, stares fixatedly at the portrait of Carlotta Valdes, a hypnotic surrender to the image of the female ancestor, heightened and mirrored by Scotty's observation of Madeleine looking at the portrait, and, later, after it appears that she is dead, his continued vigil at the scene of Carlotta's portrait, now being stared at by another woman. He taps her on the shoulder, breaking a spell that this new woman does not seem to be under in the first place, shattering his own momentary fantasy of Madeleine's return and with it his own engulfment within her immersion in the maternally-charged gaze. Just as Madeleine appears to be hypnotically fascinated by a powerful female and maternal ancestor, Sandra is tethered to the memory of Elizabeth, a memory given reified life by the figure of the tomb. But the differences are also crucial. The Carlotta story, as Judy explains in her voice-over letter-writing, was "partly real, partly made-up," a hodgepodge of fact and fiction designed to ensnare the vulnerable and afflicted Scotty; Elizabeth truly existed, was *truly* Sandra/Amy's mother, and did once hold and love her now adult and hopelessly bereft daughter who wishes to "revenge" her. The power of an art-object over the spectator as a compelling intellectual idea merges here with the power of an actual mother over her actual daughter, within the world of the fiction text at least, giving an unbearable emotional authenticity and urgency to art-conscious and meta-cinematic concerns and contexts.

In conclusion, I want to discuss the climactic moments of the film, its most significant. In Schrader's original script, there is an entire third act that De Palma dispensed with, much to Schrader's chagrin. Both Courtland and Sandra are sent to insane asylums, he for killing La Salle, she because the events have driven her mad. Released from his institutionalization, he travels back to Italy and finds her older, still beautiful, and utterly catatonic. Courtland then stages a fake version of the kidnapping in which he offers Sandra the "real" money at last, leading to her cure and her passionate embrace of "Daddy." In Schrader's original script, Courtland unambiguously embraces Sandra lovingly at the end, "in a long tender kiss."⁴

I believe that the ending that De Palma—who also co-wrote the story for the film, further confirming his involvement in its inherent conceptualization—devised demonstrates most vividly his personal stamp as an auteur, his own, if you will, obsessions. If we posit that De Palma's chief identification figure in the film is not Courtland but Sandra, the wronged child who plots against the father's master plot while seeking his love, approval, acceptance, and public demonstration of all of these, we might be inclined to read the final moments as a metaphor for De Palma's furious, conflicted, urgent attempt to run towards his cinematic father, Hitchcock. In De Palma's signature slow motion technique, used here for the first time, Courtland runs towards Sandra—determined to kill her for betraying him and

working with La Salle to do so, not yet aware that she is his daughter. From the reverse direction, and in an opposing spirit of exultant joy, Sandra runs towards Courtland—believing that he has finally brought the money to her. La Salle perversely handcuffed the money-filled suitcase to Courtland's hand, and he runs towards Sandra, one hand holding the suitcase, the other the gun. But Courtland bumps into a hapless airport police officer, and the fateful money bursts out of the suitcase and swooshes into the air of the airport corridor, showering the pair running towards one another (the image recalls the swirling money at the end of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*).

If we read Courtland as Hitchcock, we can read Sandra as De Palma's identification figure, pursuing a fantasy of merger with his cinematic predecessor and "father" Hitchcock, a fantasy that includes the wish that, somehow, Hitchcock will cast his benediction on the wayward, perverse, copying child. (Hitchcock did not approve of *Obsession*, being rather dismayed by it. De Palma may have anticipated the father's wrath.) I want to argue, however, that in this highly allegorical and stylized sequence, Courtland should be read not as the cinematic father, but as an allegorical figure of the Hollywood machine, the movie producer and studio head figured as the dark, dubious specter of male power. The belief that Courtland has finally "brought the money" might signal something like the moment in which the erratic, idiosyncratic movie director finally receives financial backing for a film from a much-needed but always ambiguously regarded movie mogul.

If Hitchcock is not the father-figure here to which Sandra so desperately and emphatically runs, who is he in the film's self-conscious and ornate allegorical schema? Hitchcock is not Courtland but, instead, the figure of the dead mother whom Sandra—De Palma's identification figure, plausibly in this context as well—obsessively copies but also strives to surpass, of whom she attempts to become the new and desired and, most importantly of all, *living* version. Pressing her face against the mother's epitaph, Sandra provides a resonant allegorical complement to a director relentlessly, inexorably, but always conflictually drawn to a generative but also threatening predecessor. *Obsession*—which is, in my view, one of the great films of the 1970s—is, finally, an act of imaginative empathy, of conflicted but urgent kinship, with the elusive embrace of Hitchcock as generative cinematic source.

Notes

- 1 See especially Robin Wood, "Brian De Palma: The Politics of Castration," *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003); Pauline Kael, *When the Lights Go Down* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980) and *Taking It All In* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1984); Kenneth MacKinnon, *Misogyny in the Movies: The De Palma Question* (Newark: London; Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses, 1990); Armond White, *The Resistance: Ten Years of Pop Culture That Shook the World* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1995); Eyal Peretz, *Becoming Visionary: Brian De Palma's Cinematic Education of the Senses* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford UP, 2008); *Un-American Psycho: Brian De Palma and the Political Invisible* (Bristol, U.K.; Chicago: Intellect, 2012).
- 2 A discrete study needs to be written of the relationship between De Palma and Schrader as collaborative and rivalrous auteurs. Whereas Schrader's *Hardcore* (1979), which he directed, and *Taxi Driver* (1976), the Martin Scorsese film that he scripted, bear obvious relationships to John Ford's magnificent, troubling western *The Searchers* (1956), neither of those films wear their relationship to their intertext as provocatively, obviously, and confrontationally on their cinematic sleeve as *Obsession* does.
- 3 Andrew Sarris, "Dreck to Kill," *Village Voice* 25: 38 (17–23 September 1980): 44.
- 4 Schrader's screenplay has been made available in the 2011 Blu Ray of the film released by the British company Arrow Films and deserves reexamination, especially for its depiction of Sandra as artist.

Contaminated Histories

CANADIAN POSTCOLONIALISM IN GUY MADDIN'S *TALES FROM THE GIMLI HOSPITAL*

By DAVID CHURCH

Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin has built an international reputation upon eccentric, autobiographically tinged melodramas constructed from the visual motifs of silent-era cinema. During his career, he has also periodically mythologized his hometown of Winnipeg, whether depicting it as the "world capital of sorrow" in *The Saddest Music in the World* [2003], or as the site of his own fraught family history in the poetic auto-ethnography of *My Winnipeg* [2007]. Reviewing a harvest of recent critical scholarship on Maddin, George Melnyk argues that "No other Canadian filmmaker today is more postmodern and postcolonial than Maddin. In creating a retro cinema like no other he has actually caught the essence of contemporary Canadian identity as it struggles to articulate a self suited to a world where the old national-realist paradigm no longer holds."¹ In this sense, Melnyk echoes various critics who have previously remarked upon the apparent "Canadian-ness" of Maddin's films,² but I will focus instead on how he imaginatively refigures his Icelandic-Canadian ancestry in his first filmic vision of the Winnipeg area, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* [1988]. This low-budget dark comedy, independently produced over two years, established Maddin as a distinct new voice in Canadian cinema, and garnered a cult reputation abroad (particularly after an eighteen-month New York run as a midnight



movie). It has become something of a truism to describe Maddin as a postmodern director, but to position him as a post-colonial director is a task that deserves further elaboration. Because it not only displays the coalescence of a filmmaking aesthetic that would define Maddin's oeuvre, but also deliberately engages with the historical intersection of the diverse cultural strands that have influenced modern-day Manitoba, *Gimli Hospital* is arguably the most significant film through which to explore the postcolonial in his work. In humorously depicting the plight of Second World settlers—a postcolonial position between colonizer and colonized—through an anachronistically “primitive” aesthetic, his debut feature complicates not only the historical sublimation of immigrant ethnicity into national identity, but also blurs potentially colonialist distinctions between classical cinema and its own ancestors. By “contaminating” the supposed authenticity of ethnic and national myths, he finds a position to speak from the margins of a modern nation under the continuing threat of American cultural imperialism.

In contrast to Canada's naturalized settlers of predominately British origin, the Canadian prairies of the mid-to-late nineteenth century were populated by a high percentage of immigrants from other European nations, and the latter soon became marked as “ethnic” within the national imaginary, according to Gerald Friesen.³ Indeed, according to one anonymous account, Winnipeggers did not initially recognize the group of Icelanders who arrived in 1875, expecting them to look “short, about four feet, rather stout and thick set, with long black hair and much like the Eskimos.”⁴ The March 1875 eruption of Mount Askja had forced a large migration of about two thousand Icelanders to Canada, where they moved west and, claiming blocks of land reserved by the federal government for minority communities, established the fishing settlement of Gimli on the shores of Lake Winnipeg.⁵ Gimli became the self-governing Republic of New Iceland in 1876, until its 1887 incorporation into the adjacent province of Manitoba. As

W. Kristjanson notes, the creation of a separate colony for Icelandic settlers was prompted by a strong desire to preserve their cultural heritage. Even after becoming de facto “Englishmen” through the colony's place on Canadian federal territory, Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada, promised the Icelanders the right to maintain their customs.⁶ Yet, Friesen notes that, as the area became less ethnically homogeneous with the influx of non-Icelandic immigrants, a tension existed within the Icelandic community between “public conformity to English-Canadian cultural norms and private, family-centered efforts to retain their language and culture and to instill in their children an awareness of and pride in their national heritage.”⁷

The latter tendency is represented by *Gimli Saga*, a 1975 local history compiled by a civic townswomen's group, which places the Icelandic-Canadian settler experience within the longstanding tradition of Icelandic sagas—and a book which directly inspired Maddin's film.⁸ For him, “there was a lot of original material in these great myths of settlers' early days that seemed very dark and bleak to the point of being funny—a really modern sensibility in this century-old story.” Yet, by Maddin's own admission, the film's melodramatic content was also inspired by his homoerotic rivalry with a man with whom he had shared a female lover, and by a professional rivalry between himself and already established Winnipeg filmmaker John Paizs.⁹

Framed as a settler tale told by an Icelandic grandmother (Margaret Anne MacLeod) to the children of a woman dying in modern-day Gimli Hospital, the film recounts how immigrant fisherman Einar the Lonely (Kyle McCulloch) contracts an unnamed disease while tending his nets, and is quarantined in hospital. In reality, the newly founded Gimli had suffered a smallpox epidemic in the winter of 1876–77, causing Manitoba to send three doctors to the quickly constructed Gimli hospital and impose a ten-month armed quarantine upon the colony. Unlike Maddin's exaggerated portrayal of multiple deaths and gruesome medical practices, patients at the real Gimli hospital



fares far better than the general population during the epidemic, largely due to receiving better diet and care than they could in their own homes. Of the sixty-four smallpox cases treated in the hospital, only one proved fatal, whereas about one hundred people died within the total colony of 1400-1500 settlers. However, the disease decimated nearby First Nations villages—including the family of John Ramsay, a local First Nations member with close ties to the Icelanders, who is also portrayed in Maddin's film.¹⁰ Set against this dire historical backdrop, Einar befriends fellow patient Gunnar (Michael Gottli), with whom he unsuccessfully vies for the nurses' attention. Growing more delirious while the nurses neglect his care, Einar confesses that he had defiled the corpse of Gunnar's young wife, Snjófríður (Angela Heck), mistaking her burial site for that of a Cree princess. Gunnar recognizes the ornamental shears that Einar had stolen from the grave, and promptly goes blind from the shock. Wandering outside the hospital, Einar and Gunnar feverishly wrestle, tearing at each other's buttocks until they collapse together. Their jealousy apparently sated, the two men, now recovered from their illnesses, greet each other the next spring as if nothing had occurred.

Despite his goal of annoying his family with this comically excessive re-visioning of his ancestral history, Maddin's off-handed admission that Icelanders "don't need mocking any more than Third World people need starving," since Icelanders are "a monument to mockery already,"¹¹ implies a certain comparison between Second World immigrants and decolonized, "developing" nations. While this comparison problematically elides the cultural, economic, and geographical differences faced by various communities within the history of colonialism, it nevertheless raises the question of where European settlers fit within Canada's postcolonial legacy.

The Settler Subject in Canadian Postcolonialism

As a former colony of both France and Britain, Canadian critics have sometimes raised Canada's alleged "Third World" status as a trope for discussing its alienation from its colonial forefathers and its subjection to continued cultural imperialism from the United States. W. J. Keith, for example, observes that "Canada has chafed under a sense of Third World status in cultural affairs, especially vis-à-vis our southern neighbor," being part of neither the U.S. nor Europe.¹² While critics like Linda Hutcheon have challenged this metaphor for "trivializing...the Third World experience and exaggerat[ing]...the (white) Canadian" one,¹³ other critics posit "Second World" settlers as an important group that has been previously neglected by Canadian postcolonial theory. This has occurred because, as Stephen Slemon observes, that immigrant demographic "is not sufficiently pure in its anti-colonialism, because it does not offer up an experiential grounding in a common 'Third-World' aesthetics, [and] because its modalities of post-coloniality are too ambivalent."¹⁴ According to Donna Bennett, English Canada has historically been both "subjected to an imperial power" and "an agent of that power in the control it has exercised over populations within Canada's boundaries." Prairie Westerners lacking that British ancestry, such as Maddin's Icelandic predecessors, "brought a new kind of postcolonialism into English-language Canada because they eventually asserted a kind of separatist claim on cultural identity different from that of the Québécois or even the Natives." For Bennett, then, becoming an immigrant is to become colonized on some level, because "one's old culture, and thus one's identity, is always marginal-

ized or under threat."¹⁵ Yet, the blurred binary between colonizer and colonized is internalized through the Second World settler's ambivalence between complicity with, and resistance to, colonialism.¹⁶ Likewise, Alan Lawson describes the settler subject as "the place where the operations of colonial power as negotiation are most intensely visible." This positionality is made possible because settlers mimic imperial power to justify the acquisition of a frontier space to which they have no originary claim, but do so through also mimicking the cultural authority of the Indigene. The cultural nationalism maintained as resistance against the imperium can thus enable a simultaneous cooptation by the imperium, in which the national "replaces the indigenous and in doing so conceals its participation in colonialism by nominating a new colonized subject—the colonizer or invader-settler."¹⁷

As these tensions play out in *Gimli Hospital*, the film's very insularity prevents us from glimpsing the world beyond the Icelandic settlement, as if restricting its scope to the ethnic community itself; most of the action occurs within the hospital, on the beaches of Lake Winnipeg, or in the wooded areas nearby. While Maddin may have constructed what Will Straw calls a "bogus ethnography,"¹⁸ becoming difficult to separate his invented Icelandic-Canadian customs and myths from real ones, he nevertheless includes numerous signifiers of Icelandic ethnicity—such as traditional Icelandic clothing, Icelandic flags, Icelandic audio recordings, images of traditional food and drink, and *glima* wrestling. The recounting of Icelandic sagas plays a prominent role in the narrative's economy of desire: Snjófríður reads the sagas to Gunnar shortly before their marriage, Gunnar captures the nurses' attention with the sagas while in hospital, and Einar is unable to win their affection because he cannot successfully tell his own tales. For the settlers, then, maintaining the nationalist boundaries of their shared cultural history is tied to the propagation of community. Indeed, Icelanders are the film's primary characters, and only occasionally do we see an indigenous person, a representative of the Canadian government, or some other outsider to Gimli. For example, John Ramsay (Don Hewak), a local Métis man, stands up for Gunnar at his wedding, and buries Snjófríður when she soon dies from the disease. Although Maddin accurately acknowledges in his DVD commentary that the real Icelanders were remarkably proficient in spreading smallpox to the indigenous locals,¹⁹ the film focuses primarily on the devastation suffered by the white settlers. Einar mistakes the dead Snjófríður for an indigenous woman because Ramsay had buried her on an elevated, birch-bark funeral bed, traditional to local First Nations peoples, instead of a "Christian grave" in the ground. The conflict that this "violation" (first cultural, then sexual) eventually engenders between Einar and Gunnar suggests that Ramsay's proximity to the Icelanders potentially threatens their authority by reasserting the place of indigeneity through his intervention as a person of mixed Native/European heritage. After all, as Lawson notes, the settler "exercises authority over the Indigene and the land while translating his (but rarely her) desire for the Indigene and the land into a desire for Native authenticity," leading to "the inadmissible desire for miscegenation."²⁰

The epidemic has weakened the Icelanders' authority to maintain full control over their customs (e.g., the afflicted Gunnar lacks the strength to dig Snjófríður's Christian grave), enabling Einar's mistaken "miscegenation" with the dead settler woman. Ironically, ethnic signifiers apparently make him as

capable of mistaking fellow Icelanders for Canada's indigenous population as English-Canadian Winnipeggers were upon the real Icelanders' arrival. The resulting fight between Einar and Gunnar occurs during Lord Dufferin's nearby speech to the settlers, as though the arrival of Canada's highest-ranking imperial representative triggers violence between those Icelanders who can enunciate their cultural history and those who cannot. Meanwhile, a highland pipe band accompanies their bloody bout of *glima* wrestling, which Maddin deems a reference to the "weird amalgam" of cultures that today take part in Gimli's annual *Islendingadagurinn* (or "Icelandic Days") celebration.²¹ Even as Lord Dufferin validates the settlers' right to preserve their national culture through their imperial claim upon the land, his presence signals a threatened dissolution of ethnic identity for the future Gimli as it becomes enveloped by the supposed "cultural mosaic" of the larger nation.

Stylistic Archaism and the "Primitive" Cinematic Past

"It all happened in a Gimli we no longer know," says Amma, the grandmother in the film's framing story. She wears the garb of a *fjalikona*, an elected female elder of the Icelandic community, indicating her strong ties to Gimli's ethnic traditions.²² Yet, Maddin quips that the modern "Icelandic gene pool has been watered down to next to nothing. When a person with a non-Icelandic surname like me gets to be one of this ethnic group's biggest spokespersons, you know your ethnicity's in trouble." He describes today's Gimli as "a town of strip malls slowly evolving into a slightly slicker, touristy thing...[that] would be far better if it had a lot more of its past in its present."²³ In this respect, Maddin may be poking fun at those later-generation Canadians who fiercely embrace their immigrant ethnicity instead of patriotically embracing Canada as a whole,²⁴ but he also retains some nostalgia for his ancestors' cultural past. Outside modern-day Gimli Hospital during the film's prologue, we hear snarls of traffic and rock music, but inside the dying mother's room, a scratched record endlessly loops the same few seconds of Paul Whiteman's 1929 rendition of "I'm a Dreamer (Aren't We All)" while a 7-Eleven Super Big Gulp sits in bed beside her. The odd juxtaposition of Amma's traditional garb, the degraded audio of the late-1920s tune, and the Super Big Gulp symbolizing imported American consumerism sets the tone for the anachronistic filmmaking style that continues throughout the film. As Amma begins the story of Einar the Lonely, Maddin cuts between zooms toward the stuttering record player and the children's faces, as if the youthful present is straining to slide back into the past at any moment—seemingly confirmed as the song resumes playing normally once we flash back to the Gimli of yore.

Even when ostensibly set in the 1870s, the film's formal qualities are more closely aligned with cinema's silent and early sound eras; the Gimli maidens, for example, wear flapper attire and expressionistic makeup. Reviewing his own film (in the third person), Maddin describes it as shot "in the vernacular spoken by film in the year of its own glorious second childhood—namely 1929. [Maddin] mixes black-and-white with toned sequences, mime with talking, locked-down expositional tableaux with bumpily fluid musical numbers." As a simulated "part-talkie," the film is intended to be "not juvenile but willfully childish" in its "primitive" aesthetic.²⁵ Indeed, discussing the connection between Maddin's stylistic archaism and his campily melodramatic plots, William Beard argues that, "On the one hand, the naïveté of and extremity of the forms enables the tap-

ping of equally naïve and extreme emotions, rooted in childhood and requiring a quasi-childlike intensity and directness of expression. On the other hand, the derisory impossibility of melodrama reflects the grotesque appearance of these feelings and events to an adult, postmodern view."²⁶ If Maddin's deliberately "primitive" aesthetic allows him to better express his own emotional concerns—albeit safely cloaked under the cover of pastiche—then I would argue that perhaps his socio-cultural concerns can be aided through this strategy as well, particularly in an age when postmodern theory has (for better or worse) challenged the individual subject's coherence as a site for forming an "authentic" sense of ethnic identity.

Maddin's archaism recalls Diana Brydon's argument that postmodern devices can serve postcolonial ends when affirming the "cultural contamination" created in the process of settlers becoming indigenous. In this way, the conflicted relationship between settlers and colonialism complicates their myths of cultural purity and authenticity. Although Brydon specifically focuses on texts by "white Canadian writers embracing Native spirituality," her argument's larger implications posit "contaminated" texts as exhibiting the openness of all cultures to outside influences, pushing toward a "new globalism [that] simultaneously asserts local independence and global interdependencies."²⁷ By resisting the same imperial power that would consign them to the larger nation, the actual Icelandic settlers' performance of subjectivity would seemingly locate them in the space of cultural difference that Homi K. Bhabha sees emerging in-between "a prefigurative self-generating nation 'in-itself' and extrinsic other nations."²⁸

In *Gimli Hospital*, however, Maddin's stylistic archaism does not support a cultural traditionalism springing from the acquisition of territory. He instead turns traditional-cum-national cinematic modes of lensing history against the nation's "teleology of progress"²⁹ by mocking the self-serious ethnic histories that give rise to comforting national-mythic narratives about modern Canada as a "cultural mosaic." In other words, using the cinematic vocabulary of old Hollywood in his 1988 film results in "contamination" between different historical periods and cultural contexts, undercutting the ethnic "authenticity" of his Icelandic immigrant tale through formal anachronism that violates accepted norms of cultural and technological "progress." At the same time, the very pastness of the archaic cinema tropes that he deploys challenges the historical authority of classical Hollywood cinema's culturally colonizing role by illustrating the constructedness and impermanence of that filmmaking style. In this way, the Winnipeg-based Maddin asserts his local independence from Hollywood, while acknowledging Canada's interdependence with U.S. culture. Indeed, he admits to initially "making the movie for a handful of friends" but also "thinking far beyond the confines of Winnipeg and Manitoba and Canada." Echoing Brydon's concept of a "new globalism," he was determined that, like a piece of pop music, a "primitive" film with "the right tone or spirit...would travel to many countries."³⁰

If the United States has arguably supplanted England as the strongest imperial force acting upon modern Canada and its cultural forms, then it is no surprise that Maddin's nostalgia, positioned between the lingering traditions of his immigrant ancestry and Hollywood's ongoing dominance in cinematically imagining history, is contaminated by both past and present. This is particularly illustrated by the film's inclusion of a black-faced minstrel occupying the bed beside Einar. As Maddin

explains, despite his love for 1920s culture, “I felt it unfair to celebrate the vocabulary of this era without acknowledging other, more shameful movie conventions, the expletives of the language then in common parlance—for one, the blackface.”³¹ Also played by Kyle McCulloch—as if a racially inflected mirror of white settler Einar—the minstrel is introduced during a scene in which the hospital nurses place a proscenium-framed puppet show at the foot of Gunnar’s bed while the doctor gruesomely operates on his leg with a sickle. Gunnar is made to watch this diversion through opera glasses while the minstrel cavorts nearby, implying that certain once-popular entertainments are politically (and even physically) painful to view today; Maddin’s cameo as the pain-inflicting doctor only reinforces the scene’s reflexivity. Such “contaminated,” anti-realist images, constructed to resemble degraded remnants of cinema history, question the medium’s past and present attempts to render cultural authenticity with any degree of accuracy. Not only are classical Hollywood’s egregious ethnic representations (such as blackface) at issue, but also a contemporary Canadian cinema that continues to lens its national and regional visions of itself using imported Hollywood standards of verisimilitude.

Patricia Clare Ingham argues that the temporal distance between certain historical periods, such as the pre-modern and modern eras, leads some historians to replicate colonialist notions of progress by essentializing the past as Other to the present, thus obscuring important points of comparison and contrast between the power structures operating in each.³² In film history, this often occurs when early (pre-1915) cinema is described as “primitive,” which Judith Mayne notes is a term often used by scholars without careful attention to the cultural and racial connotations it carried before the birth of cinema. As Mayne observes, historians like Tom Gunning and Kristin Thompson, for example, have respectively described early cinema as a “‘period of lack in relation to later evolution’” or “‘a system apart, whose simplicity can be of a value equal to more formal aesthetic traditions.’” Cinema’s origins thus serve as “primal scenes” for film theorists who, by focusing on early cinema through “a fascination with otherness, with the exotic, with all that is seemingly alien to Western culture and subjectivity,” posit “not only early films but early viewers as captured within a naïve, childlike state of reception.”³³ Although historians like Janet Staiger have convincingly challenged the supposed naïveté of early films and their spectators,³⁴ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster notes that film theorists compulsively return to the “fetish cabinet” of early cinema in search of “the seemingly lost continents of subjectivity and agency.”³⁵ Still, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam observe, cinema initially emerged as a colonialist technology supporting notions of historical and cultural progress by making “other” worlds accessible to Western audiences. Early cinema inherited “the structures laid down by the communication infrastructure of empire,” and spectatorship of this popular mass entertainment “mobilized a rewarding sense of national and imperial belonging” that was “flattering to the imperial subject as superior and invulnerable observer.”³⁶ Deployed within scopic regimes of imperial power, yet today marked by its supposed primitivity, early cinema itself can thus be figured as both colonizing and colonized. Later cinematic developments have seemingly eclipsed the Western progress that it originally represented, relegating it to cultural obscurity, despite the continuing power of the cinematic forms to which it gave rise.

Maddin’s film mimics the colonial power of early cinema to

frame ethnically marked people like the Icelanders as seemingly strange and exotic, but by adopting the form of a part-talkie—an uneasy hybrid between the silent and sound eras—he asserts an alienating measure of cultural difference from the imperialism represented by (post)modern Hollywood cinema. In other words, the formal “primitivism” of the early-classical Hollywood style that he simulates effectively contaminates the distinctions between cinema’s 1870s prehistory and its 1980s post-classical contemporary era, without simply conflating those periods. Noting Western audiences’ “frisson of colonial condescension” toward Bollywood musicals, for example, Maddin opines that “Western white folk are ashamed and disparaging of melodrama” because it evokes “more innocent times—the days when our corny ancestors believed in such unrealistic stories, told with such a charming technical naïveté. [...] Raised on Hollywood films, you crave melodrama without knowing it [...] and you unwittingly watch it at your multiplexes already. Only you can’t recognize it until it’s imported.”³⁷ His own anachronistic use of melodrama, then, contributes to the apparent “primitivity” of his work, which broad Canadian audiences would be unable to easily accept because their tastes have already been shaped by a contemporary American film culture that, to support imperialist notions of cultural progress, typically disavows its nineteenth-century melodramatic roots. Indeed, although they had previously accepted one of his earlier short films, the Toronto Film Festival rejected *Gimli Hospital* because the selection committee did not realize that the film was intentionally “primitive.”³⁸

Donna Bennett notes that, during the 1920s, Canada encouraged its non-British immigrants “to contribute something of their heritage as a way of creating the new national culture” that could resist an influx of cheap American cultural products. This was intended as “a transitory phase, because newcomers would not only modify the culture of Canada but would themselves be modified and Canadianized—both by the settlement experience itself and by their exposure to the culture already in place in the country.” The resulting works—including the foundational texts of “Prairie realism,” which sprang from areas like Manitoba—were received less in terms of ethnic or immigrant identity than as speaking to a wider national identity.³⁹ Maddin’s quasi-1920s aesthetic, then, harkens back to a period when Icelandic-Canadian identity faced cooptation by the nation, but his mimicry of American cultural products is intended to highlight Canadian national culture’s failure to maintain its own boundaries. In a sense, he deploys the imperium’s (past) representational modes in order to partially reclaim the settlers’ impure relationship with colonialism, confronting the paradoxical history of Canada’s own national-colonial project in the process. Hollywood has rendered Canadian cinema in general as contaminated as his own ethnic heritage is, but for Maddin, this does not mean disempowerment; after all, as Brydon observes, “contamination” by colonialism does not necessarily imply complicity.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Today, Canadian filmmaking “is conditioned not only by the realities of Hollywood, but also by the often paradoxical interventions of provincial and federal governments who wish to foster both an independent Canadian cinema and a commercially successful one,” according to Brenda Austin-Smith. While the tradition of Prairie realism persists in some Manitoban film, Maddin’s work rejects realism and “prairie-ness” by “insisting

instead on its relation not to nationality, but to a genealogy of filmic images." Austin-Smith declares this a byproduct of Manitoba's marginality to the Canadian commercial mainstream that imitates Hollywood; rather than trying to compete with Hollywood, then, Maddin remains outside the fray by making films with the limited resources at his disposal.⁴¹ As Canadian cinema is ever more dominated by U.S. culture, speaking from the margins operates not to reassert a unified national or ethnic identity, but to signal the impossibility of a Canadian identity uncontaminated by colonial power. If Bhabha argues that a supposedly "'true' national past...is often represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype," then I would argue that Maddin's rejection of realism and exaggeration of Icelandic stereotypes to parodic excess is less about refiguring the past through a sense of ancestral ethnic solidarity than it is a commentary on the unstable "present of the people's history" that evades enunciation in simplistic national terms.⁴²

Indeed, in the modern-day epilogue of *Gimli Hospital*, a film literally about the inevitable threat of contamination, the mother dies. Her young daughter asks Amma if she will be their new mother, but she declines, saying she will visit if their father (with whom she quarreled at the film's start) lets her, and begins telling a new story. Although the bastion of Icelandic tradition remains in tension with the imperial father, she defers to his authority—yet, the nostalgia in her settler narratives is a failed anesthetic for her listeners, unable to conceal the troubled boundaries between colonizer and colonized. The ethnic history she narrates is already contaminated by early Hollywood tropes, as if colored by memories of moviegoing from her own youth. It thus remains up to members of the younger generation, like Maddin himself, to decide whether to entertain select cultural valences, inevitably negotiating past and present histories of immigrant and national identity. His film illustrates that if the settler subject is "contaminated" by colonialism, then the settler's descendants retain the potential to contaminate colonialism's national myths in return—ultimately offering important fuel for postcolonial challenges to narratives of cultural authenticity and historical periodization. David Church is a doctoral candidate in Communication and Culture at Indiana University, and the editor of *Playing with Memories: Essays on Guy Maddin* (2009).

Notes

- George Melnyk, "Packing, Unpacking, and Repacking the Cinema of Guy Maddin," *Great Plains Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2011): 153.
- Notable discussions of this dimension in Maddin's work include Geoff Pevere, "Guy Maddin: True to Form," *Take One*, Fall 1992, 9; Will Straw, "Reinhabiting Lost Languages: Guy Maddin's *Careful*," in *Canada's Best Features: Critical Essays on 15 Canadian Films*, ed. Gene Walz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 311-14; William Beard, "Maddin and Melodrama," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 13-15; David L. Pike, "Thoroughly Modern Maddin," *CineAction*, no. 65 (2004): 15; Lee Easton and Kelly Hewson, "'I'm Not an American, I'm a Nymphomaniac': Perverting the Nation in Guy Maddin's *The Saddest Music in the World*," in *Playing with Memories: Essays on Guy Maddin*, ed. David Church (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 224-38; and John Semley, "From Big Snow to Big Sadness: The Repatriation of Canadian Cultural Identity in the Films of Guy Maddin," *CineAction*, no. 73/74 (2008): 32-37.
- Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 244.
- W. Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba: A Manitoba Saga* (Winnipeg: Wallingford, 1965), 30-31.
- W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 159.
- Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba*, 58, 75.
- Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 262.
- Gimli Saga: The History of Gimli, Manitoba* (Gimli, MB: Gimli Women's Institute, 1975).
- Guy Maddin, "Conversations with Guy Maddin," interview by William Beard, in *Playing with Memories*, 248-49; and Guy Maddin, "Tales from the Gimli Hospital: The Original Script," *Cinema Scope*, no. 20 (2004): 41.
- Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba*, 49-51.
- Quoted in Caelum Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium: The Films of Guy Maddin* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2000), 43.
- W. J. Keith, "Third World America: Some Preliminary Considerations," in *Studies on Canadian Literature: Introductory and Critical Essays*, ed. Arnold E. Davidson (New York: MLA, 1990), 5.
- Linda Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 171.
- Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," *World Literature Written in English* 30, no. 2 (1990): 35.
- Donna Bennett, "English Canada's Postcolonial Complexities," in *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, ed. Cynthia Sugars (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004), 116-17, 122.
- Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire," 38-39.
- Alan Lawson, "Postcolonial Theory and the 'Settler' Subject," in *Unhomely States*, 155-56, 159-60.
- Straw, "Reinhabiting Lost Languages," 306.
- Guy Maddin, DVD commentary track, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* (Kino Video, 2000). Kristjanson confirms the historical accuracy of this devastating effect upon the indigenous population (*The Icelandic People in Manitoba*, 49-51).
- Lawson, "Postcolonial Theory and the 'Settler' Subject," 156-57.
- Maddin, "Conversations with Guy Maddin," 249.
- In a tradition inaugurated in 1924, the *fjallkona* presides over *Íslendingadagurinn*, which dates back to approximately 1890, according to Jónas Þór, *Íslendingadagurinn 1890-1989: An Illustrated History* (Gimli, MB: Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, 1989), 2, 39.
- Maddin, *Gimli Hospital* DVD commentary track.
- For Maddin's comments on this tendency in the context of *The Saddest Music in the World*, a later film that also humorously engages issues of ethnic identity in Canada, see Guy Maddin, "The Pleasures of Melancholy: An Interview with Guy Maddin," interview by Marie Losier and Richard Porton, *Cineaste* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 21.
- Guy Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar: Selected Writings* (Toronto: Coach House, 2003), 91-92.
- Beard, "Maddin and Melodrama," 11.
- Diana Brydon, "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy," in *Past the Last Post*, 195-96. Maddin's frequent collaborator, University of Manitoba film professor George Toles, suggested the name "Gunnar" after Icelandic-Canadian novelist Kristjana Gunnars (Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 47), whose work Brydon discusses as exemplifying the immigrant voice that disputes notions of cultural authenticity ("The White Inuit Speaks," 197-202).
- Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 148.
- Ibid.*, 149, 151.
- Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 46.
- Guy Maddin, "Tales of Guy Maddin," interview by Mike White, in *Guy Maddin: Interviews*, ed. D. K. Holm (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 48-49.
- Patricia Clare Ingham, "Contrapuntal Histories," in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, eds. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 49-58.
- Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 180-82. Admittedly, Maddin's films draw more upon a more classical film vocabulary than a pre-1915 one, but references to early cinema, such as the "cinema of attractions," are often employed in discussing his work.
- Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 101-23.
- Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Captive Bodies: Postcolonial Subjectivity in Cinema* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 186-87.
- Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 30, 92-93, 103-04.
- Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar*, 76-77.
- Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 57-58; and Pevere, "Guy Maddin," 48-49.
- Bennett, "English Canada's Postcolonial Complexities," 118-19.
- Brydon, "The White Inuit Speaks," 191-92.
- Brenda Austin-Smith, "Strange Frontiers: Twenty Years of Manitoba Feature Film," in *Self Portraits: The Cinemas of Canada Since Telefilm*, eds. André Loiselle and Tom McSorley (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 2006), 238, 240, 247.
- Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 152.

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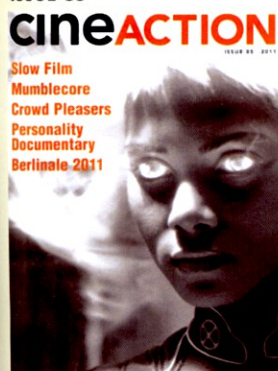
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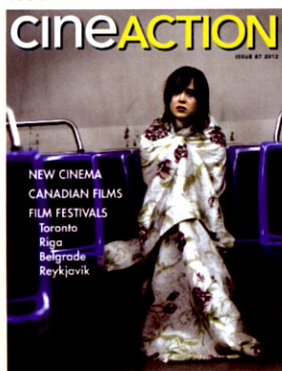
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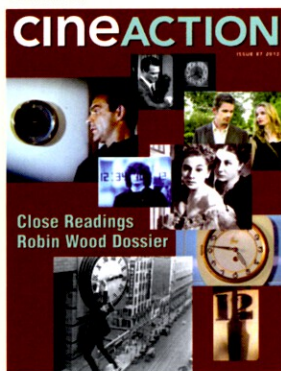
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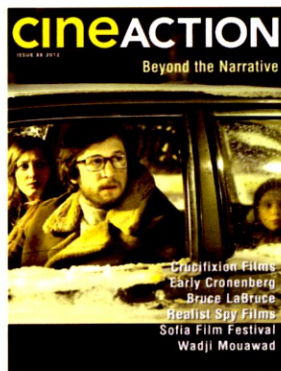
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